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How the Wild-cat kept the Spaniards at bay

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THE MASTER BEGGARS OF BELGIUM

L. Cope Cornford

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TO

D. L.

I DO not here tell over those sunbright memories, which moved my gratitude to seek your indulgence, that I might adorn with your initials the beginning of this book: for, the history itself will show them forth; as, in the days of sacrifices, a handful of consecrated herbs burning upon the altar, exhaled the affections of the offerer.

Here, then, let me present you with a tale of old time: wherein the scenes are laid, and the persons of the legend pursue their affairs, in that foreign country of rich plains and shining water, usurped from the waste kingdom of the sea and sown with monumental cities, which you know: a land so eloquent of calamitous generations and ancient, bloody wars long since composed; that, were no histories extant, written (according to the vaunt of the knightly chronicler) for "princes and persons of quality," a man could surely trace the footprints of the dead: and go to and fro, and sleep; and wake to find their story in his heart.

For here is the romancer's business: to record the notable doings of the great, invisible world that presses about the things tangible of our little, doubtful life: so that memory may joyfully enshrine them, together with those fragrant treasures which the mighty hand of Time has purified, and made free of pain for ever.

And so it is my earnest hope, that when these shadows from out the bright mist of the old, heroical days, which I have tried to show you, shall mingle with your holiday memories as you sit beside the winter fire, you may count their acquaintance neither unprofitable, nor unworthy of remembrance.

L. C. C.

BRIGHTON,
June, 1896.

Der wahre Bettler ist
Doch einzig und allein der wahre König!

Lessing: Nathan der Weise.

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THE
MASTER-BEGGARS IN BELGIUM

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE MONK HILARION HEARKENED TO A BIRD IN THE WOODS.

It is now more than three hundred years since the Netherlands gave to Europe so shining an example of resistance to oppression. There was then, as there is now, one Power drunk with insane ambition; and it was then the heroic little nation of the Netherlands that withstood the oppressor, as it withstands him to-day. In the sixteenth century, the name of the tyrant nation was Spain; in the eighteenth, France; in the twentieth, Germany. The Netherlands, like England, ever fought for freedom; and it is ordained that the champions of freedom, how sore soever the battle goes against them in the beginning, to whatever straits they may be diminished, shall win in the end. It seems that they must be fighting on what we call the right side.

No doubt but the enemy also believes that he

is fighting for conscience' sake; and they are precisely these opposing convictions which make war inevitable; for only when the quarrel is brought to the arbitrament of arms, does the God of battles decide the issue. Sometimes it is settled by a victory on the field; more often, by the leisurely and irrevocable verdict of the spirit of man. But ultimately the verdict is always given on the side of freedom.

In all such warfare, the contest centres about a protagonist on either side; who in his own person represents the nation or the people at his back. And working with him, are the lesser leaders under his command, in a descending scale that finally merges into the mass of the average; in which, kind reader, perhaps you and I are to be found. And what happens to the average man on these occasions, and how he feels, whether he lived and fought and suffered three hundred years ago, or whether he is living and fighting and suffering to-day, is of an interest as great in kind, though less in degree, as the interest of the character and of the actions of the leaders. In the picture, these things should be limned in their due proportion. And whether three hundred years since or last week, it is the same spirit. This story shows whence the Belgians of to-day drew their spiritual inheritance, and its quality;

who were their leaders, and the leaders of their enemies; and what were the ordinary people. Such, at least, was the writer's intention. And so to our tale.

The Duke of Alva, Governor-General of the Netherlands, sat in his palace of Jauche in Brussels, attended by his five-and-twenty gentlemen, his fifty halberdiers, his six trumpeters, and his six interpreters: conducting with an admirable composure, the campaign of salvation on behalf of his master, the noble prince, defender of the ancient Catholic faith, King Philip of Spain. The four-and-twenty thousand veterans of the Governor-General's army were quartered upon the principal cities, so that the Duke held (as it were) the country by the throat; for six months his Council of Troubles had toiled religiously, pen in hand, knee-deep in warrants of death, of torture, of confiscation; when, in the month of March, in the year of our Lord 1568, the Governor-General proceeded to issue a simple and comprehensive proclamation, by which every man, woman, and child in the Netherlands, with a few inconsiderable exceptions, were sentenced to death for the crime of heresy. In city and village the tainted inhabitants were sacrificed by troops, with every circumstance of outrage, for

their own souls' welfare and for the sake of example; while the monkish communities looked forth from their walled demesnes upon a land made desolate.

But the subtle spirit of heresy rides upon the air, floating over consecrated battlements as lightly as thistle-down, and neither terror, nor the punctilious observance of austere rules bequeathed by saints enthroned long since high in the monk's heaven, can always stay the malefic influence.

So it was that the monk Hilarion set out to fish from the little Priory of Saint Peter at Bouillon, with a mind much vexed and a spirit heavily perturbed.

The shallow river up which he loitered, casting his line for grayling, runs in a loop through the valley of Bouillon,* encircling with a shining arm the huge castle that lies along the crest of a mount of rocks, dominating the passes of the hills. The monk's thoughts began to flow smoothly with the flowing stream. He recalled, like a gallery of pictures, the events of yesterday evening and his meditations of the night.

* On what is now the Belgian frontier; three hundred years later, Bouillon heard the guns of Sedan, twelve miles distant; and the wounded were brought to the castle, in which the Count de la Marck once kept ward.

Between supper and compline he had escaped from the devotional exercise conducted by the Prior, into the great garden, and, making a ladder of a pear-tree, had ensconced himself on the broad, grass-grown top of the wall. There were times when the very sight of the Prior Smaragdus bred a nausea within him; for his superior, a glozing, large-headed priest with a huge brown beard and a porcine eye, was gifted with a spring of pious sentiment that flowed at a touch, like honey; while the monk Hilarion was a youth of a philosophical and clean habit of mind.

Gazing through the dark at the glimmering lights of the Hospital, that stood above the mean houses lining the opposite bank of the murmuring river and beneath the Castle ramparts, a familiar fancy belonging to that familiar outlook came once more across Hilarion: he felt a degrading bond of kinship with the sombre building yonder, devoted to the repulsive service of the impotent and the sick. Like the hospice, he was planted as a monument to the atoning piety of the Seigneurs d'Orchimont, a mere engine for the vicarious performance of good works.

For five years since, Hilarion's father, the Seigneur Baldwin d'Orchimont, had dedicated his son to God, placing the boy of fifteen in the

Priory of Saint Peter; and having bought off a formidable term of purgatory by this parental sacrifice, he crossed his hands and delivered his spirit to the shades. Dame Agnès, his wife, thereupon went to live at the Hospital of Saint George, which had been founded by her husband's ancestors, and mortgaged, as her son was, to the Lord of Purgatory: where, a year or two later, she died; and, since no monk may call anything whatsoever his own, the d'Orchimont estate fell into the Priory, and was thereafter duly administered by the Cellarer. Recalling these things, Hilarion pictured the life that might have been his; and marvelled, with a sullen indignation, at the singular egotism of parents.

At this moment the sound of a distant trampling of hoofs caught his attention, and presently a party of horse wound into sight at a foot pace down the road that ran along the river beneath the Priory walls. In front rode a single horseman, and behind him two riders carried torches dropping with flakes of fire. The fierce light gleamed upon the steel morions of some thirty men-at-arms, and flickered on the barrels of the arquebuses slung over their shoulders, and the steel maces hung at their saddle-bows. Hilarion stared eagerly at the lean, tanned faces of the riders, redly illumined; and as they passed jingling and creaking beneath him, the monk

noted that they wore the badge of the Bishops of Liége embroidered on back and breast. In the midst of the men-at-arms a lady wearing a scarlet hood rode on a grey palfrey; behind her, riding upon mules, paced a couple of monks, followed by three or four hand-led sumpters.

The troop retreated down the road and thundered slowly across the wooden bridge that gave upon one of the Castle entrances, the torchlight wavering in the river and transfusing strangely with the light of the moon which hung above the black woods; and the monk Hilarion fastened his eyes upon the patch of scarlet in the midst of the gleaming and dark forms and the tumultuous shadows, until it vanished through the gateway. He watched the torches streaming up the long, circuitous approach to the main entrance of the Castle: heard the boom of the first drawbridge falling into place, then the second; and came to himself with a sudden, bleak sense of isolation.

The monastery bell began to ring to compline, and, sick with discontent, Hilarion entered the Oratory. A solitary candle burned upon the lectern, illuminating the dull, familiar countenance of the Reader. With a deadly contraction of the heart, Hilarion considered the interminable years during which he was condemned to behold this spectacle, and to patter

the antistrophes of the weary Psalms appointed; for monks never seemed to die like souters and the laity. The passing invasion of the great and strange world that lay beyond the hills had stirred the boy's spirit like the call of trumpets. All night long, as he lay half sleeping and half awake on his pallet in the great dormitory, the remembrance ran in his head of a field-preaching he had heard by chance, two years before, at Arlon, whither he and a brother monk had been sent upon an errand. As the couple neared the place, they met the whole city pouring forth, escorted by armed bands, into an open space without the gates, fortified by barricades. Engulfed in the crowd of heretics, the pair of monks had received a turgid and fiery draught of heresy. Two couple of spears had been planted in the ground, with hafts crossed; upon these was laid another spear, and against this the orator leaned his shoulders. The little, pale man with bright eyes like a bird's, had discoursed for two full hours with a raging earnestness that brought out the sweat upon his face. However the Prior Smaragdus might weep into his beard, thought Hilarion, there was sense in that little fire-brain's talk between the spears; and, falling asleep, he was immediately awakened by the porter to sing matins.

After the office of prime, which was sung five

hours later, the Prior had desired Hilarion to go fishing, since the morrow was a Friday. "Go forth, my son," said the Prior Smaragdus, according to his custom and the habit of his kind, "and may Saint Peter render fruitful your toils; and the while thou labourest, neglect not to meditate upon thy labour, which (like all earthly works) is no more than a parable, full of spiritual significations. We know (do we not?) what saith the Vulgate: how that Saint Peter and Saint Andrew his brother, being fishermen, and casting their nets into the sea, the Lord—the Lord," repeated the Prior, as relishing a large mouthful of honey, "the Lord did say unto them, 'Come ye after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men'—fishers of men. Think upon it, my son. Roll the words," continued the Prior, unctuously, "under thy tongue as a choice morsel all the day long, that so the labours of thy hands may be to thee a recreation of the soul. *Benedicite.*"

But this simple exhortation was no better than gall to Hilarion: some subtle element inherent in his blood revolted from the monkish conversation; he could bear no more; and coming thus to the end of his train of troubled recollections, he laid by his rod and sat down on the bank. Across the stream, an amphitheatre of purple woods rose from the water's lip high into the

grey sky: the wind blew sweetly down the valley, smelling of the spring: from deep within the branchy recesses rang the eager fluting of a bird; and Hilarion, hearkening, heard in the thin, lusty wood-notes an irresistible call to life unfettered under the open sky.

There are times when the forces of man's being poise themselves, in imminence to make or to abjure a momentous resolution. Hilarion got to his feet with he knew not what impulses burning in his blood, when he was aware of a maiden in a scarlet hood hurrying towards him, down the riverside path that led into the woods up stream, beyond the Castle boundaries.

"I bid you to beware, Father!" she cried. "The Wild Beggars are out in the woods. I have seen them."

The monk caught up his rod and creel at the word, and strode along beside the girl towards the Castle.

"Where have you seen these robbers, mistress?" he asked.

"Up in the woods behind us," she answered. "I came out of a sudden upon an open place where was heather growing, and saw smoke rising into the sky from the trees beyond. So I hid among the bushes and drew nearer, and then I saw them clustered under the trees about a fire, grey wild men with long mustachios, armed

with long sword and pistol and arquebus. Methought I should never get away, but I did. I will warn the Count de la Marck, and doubtless he will turn out the men-at-arms. But if you are of any monastery near, Father, I beseech you to carry tidings thither; lest the Beggars should come upon you unawares, and do as they did at Reninghelst, but two months since."

Above the tumult in his mind awakened by the menacing danger, the monk was suddenly conscious of his coarse frock with its twisted linen girdle, that seemed, like a leper's robe, to set him outcast and aloof. The two walked swiftly side by side in silence for near upon a quarter of a mile.

"Your blessing, Father," said the girl at length, as though it were something she had forgotten. She turned her face towards the monk as she spoke.

"*Benedicite*," he returned, mechanically. Their glances met, and something looked out of the girl's grey eyes that pierced the murky tissue of monachal notions, part ascetic, wholly oriental, in which Hilarion's education had enwrapped him. "But I am no priest to bind and to loose," he added. "I am only a simple cenobite."

"But you will become a priest ere long, will you not?" asked the girl, curiously.

"No," said Hilarion. "I do not think so. I

am sure I am unfit for the office." He hesitated, and the new influence beside him drew the words from him unawares. "I do verily believe I had rather become a Beggar of the Woods."

She glanced at him with so lively an expression of astonishment, or horror, or both, that the youth was heavily abashed.

"What! you would be a renegade—an heretic?"

"Nay, not that," said Hilarion, eagerly. "I never took the vows. 'Twas my parent's doing."

He stopped short and looked anxiously at his companion; but she continued to gaze steadfastly before her in silence, and Hilarion experienced a painful depression of spirits.

By this time a turn of the river had brought them beneath the northernmost bastion of the Castle, towering upon the precipitous escarpment as though it had grown there in the course of nature. At the foot of the rock, in front of the stone round-house that guarded the sally-port, a sentry marched to and fro. When the pair came within a few paces of him, the man halted, bringing his halberd to the salute.

"I thank you for your courtesy in escorting me," said the girl, stopping and turning towards Hilarion with a deep reverence. The next moment she had disappeared through the open wicket, and Hilarion stood motionless, gazing absently after her. The sentry observed him for

a few moments, with a grave attention, before breaking in upon his abstraction.

"Give you good-day, master monk," cried the soldier, suddenly. "I crave your blessing. Unless your private accompt at heaven's treasury be exhausted at this time." He winked towards the Castle. "A poor man-at-arms can but wait," he added.

"You are malapert, fellow," said Hilarion, coming to himself with a jar.

"Why, see now," said the man, with a delighted leer upon his battered visage, "we cannot all be friars! Look at me. I vow I would have made a proper monk. The monk takes all and pays nothing, while the good soldado must sink his scanty wage in buying of indulgences. And talking of indulgences putteth me in mind that my chest needs plenishing. Have you a couple or so in your pouch, Father?"

Hilarion regarded the ribald sentry with scorn, and made as if to go. But the soldier planted himself across the path.

"Listen to me, monk," said he. "The man-at-arms guards the postern, while the monk goes a-walking with the lady. A right excellent plan, says the monk. But is that all? No. What then remaineth? Canst not guess? Why, a guerdon to the man-at-arms, young smooth-and-innocent. Come! A gold crown or a parcel of

indulgences, I care not which. I can be dumb as a stone, master monk, let me tell you; but an if I talk, *Dame!* my tongue wags like a starling's."

Hilarion was taken with a sudden heat of anger at these gross insinuations. Dropping his rod, he struck with all his force at the grizzled face with the impudent blue eyes. But the wary man of war parried the blow with such vigour that the monk reeled backward, his arm tingling from wrist to shoulder. The sentry leaned composedly on his halberd.

"That was but a foul stroke, master monk," said he, shaking his head. "A cowardly stroke, my son. Were I to give you blow for blow, I fall under the Inquisition. You know the penalty for striking a priest, friar? But I doubt me if you be a monk indeed; I would never have believed a monk walked the earth would dare to strike a man-at-arms. *Dame!* 'Twas worth monies to behold the feat; and so, depart in peace, with my benison, friar."

A good deal mortified (for it appeared to his simple mind that the soldier had put him clearly in the wrong), quivering with the shock of the blow, and conscious of his own ill grace, Hilarion passed his late antagonist without looking at him, and took his way in a fever of poignant emotions; but uppermost in his mind loomed the menacing figures of the grey men with long

mustachios lurking in the woods about him. The sentry picked up the fishing-rod and full creel of fish, which the monk had forgotten, and returned to his post with a contented face.

Although Bouillon lay far to the south of the Netherlands, and out of the track of events, tales of the Beggars' doings had been brought by travelling merchants going to and fro across the marches into France, and Hilarion knew their history. Two years before, during the spring of 1566, when the renowned Count Brederode, together with his noble confederates, presented, with the utmost ceremonial, his famous Request for the revocation of the Edicts of the Inquisition to the Duchess of Parma, then Regent of the Netherlands for King Philip of Spain, the Seigneur de Berlaymont so far forgot himself as to employ the most injurious expressions towards these patriots. In his opinion (so he informed the Duchess), the noble Brederode and his fellows were no better than *Gueulx*. A few days later the Count Brederode held his historic banquet in the Culembourg Palace: where three hundred roaring rebels drank in defiance to the health of the Beggars; and thereafter appeared upon the streets drest all in grey, and girt with the mumpers' wallet and wooden bowl. The foes of the Inquisition throughout the whole country speedily adopted the nickname, which was amplified later,

by the ironical Count d'Arenberg, into that of Master-Beggars. Nobles, burgesses, and outlaws, all were Beggars when occasion served; so that the grey cloak soon came to cover equally the patriot conspirator, the bandit with a religious passion for pillaging monasteries, or the soldier of fortune. And when the Prince of Orange opened his series of campaigns, his troops of mercenaries fought side by side with Beggar regiments.

In the summer of 1566 the Beggars had raised the *Beeldstorm*, breaking into churches in all the cities, and utterly destroying the images and treasures of the priesthood. The fiercest reprisals followed, and the tide of guerilla warfare between Beggar and Spaniard surged back and forth, the Beggars slaying all Spaniards that fell into their power, and sacking monasteries. They had left the priests themselves scatheless, however, until their capture of the Monastery of Reninghelst, in the north, during January, 1568, (of which Hilarion's companion had spoken): when, after carrying the monks into the woods, the Beggars did them to death by moonlight, with a terrifying ingenuity of ceremony and circumstance.

Pondering upon these things, by the time Hilarion reached the Priory, the resolution of his life was fixed.

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE COUNT DE LA MARCK WAS TAKEN WITH A SCRUPLE OF RELIGION.

THE lady in the scarlet hood climbed the stairway to the ramparts, and, preceded by a page bearing a lighted taper, she descended thence through a maze of subterranean passages to the great hall. Standing with his back to the fire of logs that glowed in the wide chimney, was a short, rotund gentleman, with little eyes of a singular brightness, and an upper lip disagreeably protuberant; family traits accentuated by his bristly, grizzled beard. Above him, the head of a huge boar looked forth from the wall: and the likeness between the race of the robber noble and that of his bestial prototype, which had caused his renowned ancestor, *le Sanglier des Ardennes*, to bear the boar's head as a cognizance, was sufficiently evident.

As the lady in the scarlet hood entered the hall from a side door, Count Robert de la Marck turned towards her with a courteous gesture singularly at variance with the ill-humour ex-

pressed in his wrinkled and bristling countenance.

"Ah, the Countess of Durbuy," said he. "Give you good-day, Countess. I trust, madam, that you have found nothing to regret in your change of abode?"

"Well, I had nearly changed it once more this morning, and that for ever and a day, I think, sir Count," replied the lady.

"Aha! And how was that?" The Boar raised one eyebrow, frowning with the other, thrust his beard forward, and looked fiercely at his guest.

"Why, your woods are stuffed full of Wild Beggars, Count. They had nearly taken me alive." And the countess related her adventure. When she had finished, Count Robert broke into an execration.

"I will take instant order upon it," he cried, with a formidable gesticulation; and turning to one of the servitors, who, clad in scarlet with the boar's head embroidered on their sleeves in silver, moved noiselessly to and fro on the rush-strewn floor, setting the long trestle tables for dinner, "send Sergeant Ogier to me," he shouted. "Mistress Jacqueline," went on the Count, turning truculently upon his guest, "how is it that you ventured beyond the walls lacking the attendance proper to your rank and condition?

You will have the goodness to remember that I am here to answer for your conduct to your reverend uncle, his Lordship of Liége."

"Sir," returned the Countess, unabashed, "in the house of my uncle I was never addressed in the terms you think proper to employ towards me. And as to your question, I must beg to refer you to Lady de la Marck."

"Come now, let be, Count, let be," interposed a black-browed, ponderous lady with a proud red face, who had entered the hall while De la Marck was speaking. "Indeed, 'twas I gave Mistress Jacqueline permission." She spread her stout hands and hunched her shoulders. "Who would have dreamed of the *Bosch-Greuzen* here? But I am distressed out of measure that little Mistress Jacqueline should have suffered such an alarm."

At this moment the muffled notes of the great bell on the ramparts, which had been cast of mingled bronze and silver by Godfrey, Lord of Bouillon and King of Jerusalem, five centuries since,* scunded the summons to dinner. From the confusion of men-at-arms and dependants who began to crowd in at the lower end of the hall a burly Fleming detached himself, and coming up to the Count, saluted.

"Sergeant," said the Count, "your dinner is yet to earn, I fear;" and leading the soldier

* It hangs there to this day.

aside, the Castellan, lowering his harsh voice, gave him a string of orders and dismissed him.

For the first time in her life, Mistress Jacqueline de Mirlamont, Countess of Durbuy, sat down to the great mid-day dinner of a garrisoned castle. Torches flared in iron sconces on the wall; for the dining-chamber, a vast arched cavern hewn from the rock, had no opening to the outer air save a tiny spy-hole, which, concealed in a recess, commanded the Castle entrance in the valley beneath. Trophies of weapons and gleaming suits of armour, set between the skins and grinning heads of beasts, were displayed upon the walls. Above the salt, the plate, the flagons, and the branched candlesticks were of massy silver and gold: for the generations of the De la Marcks had made the plundering of monasteries their chief recreation; until the usurping Spaniard forced the Holy Inquisition upon the country. From her seat upon the daïs, Jacqueline de Mirlamont looked down the ranks of men-at-arms and nondescript serving men and women feeding voraciously, in a steam of victuals mingling with drifts of smoke from the torches and tapers, amid a prodigious and echoing clamour; and the convent-bred girl experienced a new sensation, the novel contact of a sensual, predatory, and wild existence.

So soon as the repast was over she followed

Lady de la Marck and the gentlewomen of the household to the great chamber above the hall.

The Count had settled himself to drinking with his society of tanned adventurers, when a page entered and informed the Castellan that a messenger from the Prior of Saint Peter's Priory prayed instant speech with him.

"Bring him in," said Count Robert.

In a few moments the page returned, followed by the monk Hilarion: who, at the Castellan's invitation, proceeded, not without stumbling, to inform the noble Count Robert de la Marck that, first of all, the reverend Prior desired the noble Count to accept his blessing and to assure himself of the said reverend Prior's constant fervent prayers on his behalf: and further, that the Prior, having received sure intelligence of the near neighborhood of a band of Wild Beggars, the abominable enemies of God and man, and in particular of Holy Church, he placed himself and his Priory under the protection of the strong arm of the Count de la Marck, who, as Castellan of the Lord Bishop of Liége (the Prior was devoutly persuaded), would never permit the least attempt at insult, sacrilege, or plunder on the part of the Beggars; and lastly, the reverend Prior desired the noble Count to send word by his messenger precisely what measures

of defence he, the noble Castellan, had in contemplation.

"And from whom did the reverend Prior receive this mighty news of which you speak, sir monk?" enquired the Count, raising his inquisitive eyebrow.

"'Twas I told the Prior, sir," returned Hilarion, ill at ease under the steely survey of the small eyes under the bristling eyebrows.

"Have you, then, seen these Beggars of the Woods?"

Hilarion, dropping his glance, noted, while he framed his answer, the force of craft and cruelty expressed in the round, small hand reposing upon the arm of the count's chair.

"No, sir Count. I but met a lady this morning——"

"Never blush for that, sirrah," the Count struck in; and the ring of soldiers about him, looking and listening with open mouth, broke into a laugh.

"Where the Prior hath dice in his pockets, the convent will play," cried one.

"Behold, gentlemen," went on the Count, extending his open hand towards the disconcerted youth. "Behold a monk who speaks the truth. Let us hasten to drink to this marvellous portent." He lifted his goblet, but paused, holding it half-way to his mouth, with

his former action of the eyebrows and his beard tilted forward. "Faith, now I look at you, friend, you appear as little like a man that is made for the tonsure of celibacy as ever I saw in the world. Come, try to drink a tass of wine with us, sirrah." And he filled a crystal goblet with wine of Beaune and pushed it towards Hilarion.

The monk looked at the ring of stupid, laughing faces, looked at De la Marck's brutal countenance, looked at the dark wine. The rule of Saint Benedict, which forbids the use of wine, crossed his mind. There was a little pause of expectancy. The next moment Hilarion made a step forward, drank the wine at a draught, and dashed the goblet upon the pavement, shivering it to fragments upon a little space whence the rushes had been trodden aside.

The Count started from his chair, leaning forward on the table.

"*Sang du Christ!* Are you stark mad, friar? Art stricken lunatic? Ho, there! Tarry, damned monk. Come back, rascal," shouted the Castellan, for Hilarion was already on the stairway leading to the great door high up in the end wall, that gave upon the ramparts. "I'll have thee swinged with dog-whips, by the Virgin! I'll have thee carbonadoed!" The reverberation of the door shutting behind the monk

mingled with the echoes of the Castellan's angry shoutings.

"Didst ever see so mad a confection of wild-fire?" said the Count, looking at his companions with a snarl.

"*Pardieu!* You stole that goblet from a witch, Count; deny it not."

"You have the most marvellous potent wine of any in the world. Didst convey it from a monastery, Count?"

But the Boar made no attempt to retort. A sudden air of abstraction had taken him. "I pray you to hold me excused, my friends," he said. "I must about ordering some affairs," and, rising from the table, he left his guests to break their flinty wits upon each other.

The Castellan despatched a page to Lady de la Marck, and repaired to his private chamber. He was standing with that cloud of abstraction settled heavily upon him, when his Countess entered, with a surprised expression upon her solid features.

The Count pushed a chair towards her. "How long is it, I pray you, since you were last at confession, madam?" he demanded, abruptly.

"Eh! What a question!" returned his wife, raising her eyebrows.

"Must I repeat it, then?" The Count, snarling, cocked his eyebrow.

"Dear!" said the Countess. "'Twas last Easter, since you have such a curiosity."

"Nearly a twelvemonth's iniquity unassoiled. You are very lax, madam, very remiss, are you not?"

"And you to say so?" cried the lady. "Tell me, Count, what means this singular solicitude?"

"Have we not to consider the Countess of Durbuy, niece to the Lord Bishop?" retorted De la Marck.

"*Dieu!*" said his wife, her face a mere mask of blank bewilderment.

"In a word, I desire you to repair this negligence," said the Count. "Mistress Jacqueline must not be suffered to relax in the exercises of her religion."

"Eh, well, compose yourself; 'tis not so long to next Easter," returned Lady de la Marck, leaning back in her chair.

"Madam," said the Count, fixing his small, sparkling eyes upon the stolid Countess, "I desire you to go with Mistress Jacqueline to the Priory no later than this afternoon."

"Now?" cried the lady, with a high accent of astonishment. "What do you say? Now? 'Tis stark impossible. *Dieu!* I think you are out of your wits, Count."

"But you are to do so, nevertheless," cried Count Robert. "I command you."

"*Tiens!*" said the Countess, totally unimpressed. "Come, tell me what is all this coil about. You are so horribly unreasonable."

"Madam," cried the baffled husband, desperately, "you do not understand."

"Truly, not I," put in the Countess.

"I pledge you my word," said De la Marck, with an angry gesture, "we stand in danger of the Inquisition. Wounds of God! Am I to fall alive into the bloody hands of the Duke of Alva because my wife is too sluggardly to be shriven like a Christian?"

"The Duke of Alva, the Duke of Alva! And prithee what hast thou to do with the Duke of Alva?" Lady de la Marck slowly raised herself upright in her chair.

"That is what I cannot tell you, madam," returned the Count, sombrely.

The Countess regarded him attentively for a moment.

"Well, well, say no more, in the name of peace. The girl and I will go to confession, an that be all. But why should not one of those idle brethren walk his idle legs across the river to the Castle, prithee?"

"I will have no common cenobite confessing in my household!" cried De la Marck. "You

heard Jacqueline relate how one of them fell into talk with her this very morning."

"Let the Prior come, then."

"*Dame!* Wouldst have me to sup with a Jack-Prior?"

"I will go, then, since so it must be," said the Countess, getting to her feet with an air of lazy resignation.

"And take with you Jacqueline de Mirlamont," said the Count, eyeing his wife as she moved to the door.

"Yes," said she. "By the way," said the Countess, pausing, "those Wild Beggars. What if these marauding profligates descended upon the Priory the while we were sweetly confessing our sins?"

"You, madam, need stand in no fear of these rascals," said the Count, with a disagreeable twist of his countenance.

The Countess was moved at last. "That is your opinion, doubtless!" she said, reddening.

"I meant," said the Count, watching her with some appearance of enjoyment, "that I know these gentlemen of the woods, and they know me. There is in consequence nought to fear. Farewell, madam. I wish you a clean and speedy shrift."

As the Lady de la Marck opened the door, the

figure of Sergeant Ogier appeared in the opening. The Count shot a glance of interrogation over his lady's broad shoulder. The sergeant nodded slightly.

"*A la bonne heure*," said Count Robert, with his fingers in his beard.

CHAPTER III.

MASTER PHILIP D'ORCHIMONT DISCOVERS HIMSELF.

When Hilarion entered the Castle on his embassy, he had already, in his own mind, renounced his monkship. There were only needed the sight of the vast fortifications, the formidable engines of war, the sturdy men-at-arms, and, above all, the savour of the rough, high-spiced freedom in which these soldiers lived like demi-gods, to kindle the monk's ardour of emancipation to a sudden heat of passion. And as he made his way out of the fortalice, it appeared to him, through the rosy mist then eddying in his brain, that Hilarion the friar had vanished with the wine he had drunk and the goblet he had shattered in a spasm of pettish anger; and that, in his room, it was no less a personage than Master Philip d'Orchimont (hurried into oblivion five years ago) who, with some trifling uncertainty of footstep and the most fervid confidence, was about to instantly encounter the Prior Smaragdus.

Philip d'Orchimont found himself translated into the Prior's chamber with a surprising un-

consciousness of the way by which he had come into his Superior's emollient presence.

"Well, my son," said the Prior Smaragdus, blandly, "and with what message did the noble Count Robert entrust you?"

Before replying, Philip d'Orchimont, so newly recalled from the shades, put his hand carefully on the back of a great chair near him, to assure himself that this solid piece of furniture was standing firm and immovable.

"The Count sent no message, Father, no message," said d'Orchimont, gazing amiably at his Superior. "No message," he repeated, suddenly, and without any such intention on his part.

"What!" cried the Prior; "no message?"

The monk Hilarion, had he not vanished out of existence, might have observed a certain contraction of the nostril on the part of his spiritual lord which was lost on Master Philip d'Orchimont.

The ambassador shook his head. "Truly," he said, "I did not tarry to receive one. The Count de la Marck and his ruffians used me with a monstrous incivility."

The Prior got suddenly to his feet. "You have drunk wine, sirrah," he cried. "You are drunken. I shame and sorrow to see it. Go to your cell, Hilarion—go to your cell."

Philip d'Orchimont felt himself comparatively unmoved by a situation which must have seriously perturbed the monk Hilarion.

"I am not drunk. And I would speak a word with you, Father," he said, with so new an accent that the other looked at him in surprise.

"You are permitted," said the Prior, after a moment's silence.

Philip d'Orchimont suddenly began to perceive that the rigours of five years' conventual discipline had twined a net of ropes about him that was not to be rent in a moment. Nevertheless, he flung himself upon the task.

"I would quit the convent, Father. I am unfit for——"

"Eh?" struck in the Prior, sharply. His face changed swiftly to an ugly and dark look, and his little eyes opened wide.

"I desire to quit the convent. I would have you to unfrock me. I have no vocation for the cenobitic life; I——"

The Prior lifted his hand. "Be silent," he cried. The oily quality was gone from his tones, leaving them acrid. "Go to, sirrah; you have been drinking with the men of Belial over yonder; you have fallen into deadly sin, so that the devil speaks in you. To your cell, sirrah, to your cell."

"I tell you," cried d'Orchimont, with a flush

of anger, "I will never be a priest. I pray you hear me speak."

"With what secret sin hast thou been dallying, to give Sathanas such power upon thee? I will yet purge ye, though I scourge thy flesh with rods."

"You will not hear me! God is my witness, the fault is yours, priest!" D'Orchimont, with a passionate gesture, glared at the Prior.

"Another word, and I lay upon you the Lesser Excommunication, as provided in the Rule for Enormous Offences. Come, sirrah, go to your cell. Must I call in the brethren?"

D'Orchimont turned and left the chamber, resolving to march straightway out of the Priory, never to return, and so cut himself loose from that body of death, Hilarion the monk, to which Philip d'Orchimont found himself so inextricably fettered.

But as he passed along the corridor, the windows of which gave upon the courtyard, his attention was caught by a clatter of hoofs upon the stones, and, looking out, he perceived three veiled figures, each with a footboy at the stirrup, in the act of dismounting. In one of them, to his surprise, d'Orchimont thought he recognised the lady of his morning's adventure; another, with still greater amazement, he saw to be the Countess de la Marck; the third had the look of a waiting-woman. At the same moment the

door of the Prior's house leading to the court-yard opened from within, and the Prior himself appeared on the threshold, his countenance changed, and creaming benignantly. The priest permitted himself to salute the two ladies on the cheek before leading them into his lodging, and d'Orchimont regarded him with a new adminicle of disgust.

The door was shut, the grooms had led the horses to the stables, and slumbrous tranquillity fell once more about the convent.

The incident stemmed the raging current of d'Orchimont's thoughts. Without formulating any reason to himself, he discovered a sudden reluctance to quit the Priory until nightfall. His haste even began to appear a trifle indecent. The Prior, at least, would be out of the way; and d'Orchimont paused to execrate his Superior. Then the remembrance of the Wild Beggars crossed his mind. But were there danger to be feared from these sacrilegists, the Count de la Marck would surely never have permitted his Countess and her guest to visit the Priory. D'Orchimont, considering the posture of affairs, found himself unable to form any conclusion thereon, save that he had better delay his flight; and, the bell ringing, he went in, for the last time, to chant vespers in the Priory of Saint Peter, in the *Laite* of Bouillon.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THE PRIOR SMARAGDUS CURSED THE BEGGARS OF THE FOREST.

The same evening the twelve brethren of Saint Peter's Priory were seated at supper in the refectory. The Reader had paused from his arduous interpretation of Saint Augustine to sip the cup of wine allotted him by Saint Benedict in consideration of his office, so that the talk and twitter of the birds in the garden without became suddenly audible; when the prolonged, sonorous blast of a horn sounded out of the twilight deepening beneath the shadow of the hills. An echo, and a fainter echo, rang, and dwindled, and fell silent.

To d'Orchimont, who alone among his fellows knew of the Wild Beggars' neighbourhood—for the Prior had bidden him to keep secret the intelligence—the sound carried a menace of disaster. He laid down his knife and listened intently. After some minutes, above the clatter of the feeding monks and the Reader's monotone, d'Orchimont thought he distinguished a tramping of feet that grew momently louder. Still,

in his uncertainty, he said no word, when there sounded a single measured footstep, with the ringing of spurs, approaching up the flagged passage leading from the courtyard to the refectory, and the Reader stopped in the middle of a period.

The next moment the door was flung open, and the great figure of an armed man, framed in the black doorway, stood on the threshold.

Stricken silent and motionless, the monks gaped upon this apparition. D'Orchimont, noting the grey tunic, the pistols, and long sword worn by the stranger, regarded with admiration the breadth and thickness of the man. He was solid and splendid as a lion: his yellow hair flowed in a mane upon his shoulders and mingled with his tawny beard; and as the Master-Beggar's glance travelled slowly round the chamber and rested for a moment upon d'Orchimont, the youth felt something potent and searching in his gaze that drew him like a spell. The stress of breathing silence was broken by the stranger.

"Give you good-even, my Fathers," he said, in a clear and quiet voice of persuasion. "Since I have come among you so suddenly, I must be mine own herald. Men call me, my Fathers, men call me The Wild-Cat." At the sound of that name, renowned among the Beggars of the Forest for cheerful outrage, a kind of voiceless

murmur went up from the listening monks, and d'Orchimont regarded the speaker with a delighted awe. The Master-Beggar went on without pausing, in gentle modulations.

"I am about a little business with Dom Prior to-night, my Fathers, and my men, I think, look to sup with you. Good Fathers all, I speak but for your warning. Use my friends with your wonted hospitality, try to overlook the singular habitudes they have perforce learned in adversity, and there shall not an hair of your heads be injured . . . a priest with a slit nose is but a sad sight. God keep you, my Fathers, from all such defeatures," said The Wild-Cat. "I would fain see Dom Prior," he went on, suavely, and beckoned to d'Orchimont, who had risen to his feet. "Prithee, shew me Dom Prior's lodging, sir monk."

D'Orchimont, without a thought of disobedience, left his place at once. The two were walking side by side down the corridor, when the remembrance of the ladies who were doubtless supping with the Prior, flashed across d'Orchimont. He stopped.

"The reverend Prior has gone on a journey," said d'Orchimont. "Or, at least, I think so," he added. "If you will remain here, sir, I will go forward and see."

The Wild-Cat laid his hand upon the monk's

shoulder. "Come, friar," he said. But d'Orchimont, although his knees quivered, stood still in his place. There was a moment's terrifying pause.

"My young friend," went on that persuasive voice, "I admire the exercise of loyalty above all earthly things. But it comes into my mind that 'tis not of Dom Prior you are thinking just now, but of others. Let me tell you at once that you are right in your surmises. My business does lie with these others and not with your reverend Prior, who may go hang for me. I will go further—I will go so far as this—and say to you, my scrupulous friend, that I mean no evil, but good towards them."

The power of that singular spell increased upon d'Orchimont: a confidence in this engaging stranger began insensibly to form within him; and he moved forward, with the heavy hand still resting on his shoulder. Turning a corner, the two came to the archway opening upon the courtyard. Beneath the archway, leaning against the stonework, was a little slender man dressed in the Beggars' grey, with ragged locks falling about a face as lean and keen as a rat's. Beyond him, d'Orchimont perceived the courtyard to be full of armed men, all in sober grey, standing loosely in groups and talking together in low tones. The Wild-Cat beckoned to the rat-like

Beggar, who thereupon followed him, and the three turned down the corridor to the left of the entrance, at the end of which was the door to the Prior Smaragdus's privy chamber. D'Orchimont knocked on the panel; a voice within cried to him to enter; The Wild-Cat, who had his hand on the latch, lifted it instantly, and the two Beggars entered upon the Prior, shutting the door upon their conductor.

D'Orchimont, left alone in the dark passage, retreated a few steps, and waited. On his right hand the serene evening light flowed in at the open archway, whence d'Orchimont could hear the murmur of talk and now and again the jingle of weapons. Presently, from beyond the door on his left, arose the treble tones of an angry woman in voluble expostulation; the next moment, as the door opened, the sounds burst forth in a stream, and The Wild-Cat appeared with Lady de la Marck clinging to his arm.

"I said so, I said so to the Count, this very day after dinner, as God's my life," she was crying. "What if these same gentlemen of the forest come the while we are at confession? quo' I. And now behold! 'Tis no fault of mine, the Virgin knows it," and she sobbed for a moment.

"Content yourself, madam; bear an easy mind," said The Wild-Cat. "These unfortunate

surprises may happen to any lady in the sad times wherein we live. Be consoled!"

"I confide in you, sir Captain; I fling myself upon your honour," sobbed Lady de la Marck. "I have no fear, not I. I believe you to be a gentleman of a noble nature. But an if you must take one of us, take—take me, or at least take Maria Desirotte (Maria is an excellent wench), but spare my little Mistress Jacqueline here, and let her go, I beseech you, sir Captain. *Mon Dieu!* that such a thing should ever come upon us."

Her voluminous skirts brushed d'Orchimont's knee as he stood against the wall; behind her was Mistress Jacqueline with her waiting-woman, Maria Desirotte. The rat-faced Beggar, locking the door behind him, sauntered after them. Jacqueline walked with head erect, her hood thrown back, defiance written so vividly upon her pale face, that her head seemed, to d'Orchimont's intense observation, to float past him in the dusk as though it were a bodiless apparition. The whole party turned into the courtyard, Lady de la Marck talking in a high, weeping voice without let or pause. D'Orchimont posted himself in the shadow of the archway. Horses were brought, and The Wild-Cat helped Lady de la Marck into her saddle and saw her forth of the convent, her groom at her bridle, and saluted

her farewell. Returning, he mounted a great white horse, and took the bridle of Mistress Jacqueline, who was already in her saddle; and, followed by the waiting-woman on her palfrey, the three clattered out of the courtyard. The beat of hoofs echoed fainter and fainter down the avenue.

The rat-faced Beggar stood in the gateway, looking after them, until the echoes died into silence; then, with a surprising agility and swiftness, he flung to the great wooden gates and shot the heavy bar into its place with a clang. Turning about, he suddenly set up a piercing call.

"Ho yo! The *Beeldstorm*,* comrades! To me, Beggars all! The *Beeldstorm!*"

In an instant, the walls rang with a deafening clamour, as the crowd of quiet men in grey took up the cry, leaped all at once into a devilish activity, and began to crowd into the Oratory, which was built along one side of the quadrangle. In a few moments d'Orchimont found himself alone, and listening (despite his late separation from the monk Hilarion) with a shock of horror to the swinging chant of a Beggar song pealing from within the church,—

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* The common name given to the spoliations of the iconoclasts.

"Slaet op den tromele, van dirre dom deyne;
Slaet op den tromele, van dirre dom does;
Slaet op den tromele, van dirre dom deyne,
Vive le gues! is nu de loes—"

that mingled with the crashing tumult of splintered glass, falling stonework, and splitting wood.

They must be damned as certainly as though the gates of hell were shut upon them, thought d'Orchimont; and marvelled at the patience of the Divine Powers, who still withheld an earthquake or a whirlwind of fire.

But the need for action plucked him by the sleeve. His thought pursued the lady of the scarlet hood: but she was gone out of reach: then he was taken with an impulse to run to the Castle for help; but remembered that long ere now Lady de la Marck must have carried the news thither, since the Beggar captain himself had let her go. D'Orchimont was reflecting upon this singular circumstance, when a dozen Beggars, gay as schoolboys, came running from the Chapel, shouting, laughing, and gesticulating.

Before d'Orchimont could see what they would be at, there was a flash and an echoing explosion; and d'Orchimont heard a bullet sing past his head and bury itself in some wood-work with a thud. One of the Beggars had unslung his arquebus and was firing at random into the

house. D'Orchimont turned the corner of the corridor and ran towards the refectory. Halfway down the passage he stopped, and divesting himself of his monk's frock, appeared in his close, dark tunic, with his girdle-knife at his belt. The firing of arquebuses and pistols went merrily forward in the courtyard. D'Orchimont could hear the rip and spattering of the bullets in the rooms about him. As he entered the refectory there was a sudden affrighted start among the brethren, and peering through the darkness, d'Orchimont perceived that there were but three or four monks who had not taken flight.

"What! are ye not all gone, my Fathers?" cried d'Orchimont. His voice rang strange to him in the great dark room.

"There shall no devil of the woods drive me from the convent, though they slay me." D'Orchimont recognised the sombre voice of the gaunt, leathern-faced Reader.

"If we are to be slain, let us at least be martyred in the light," said d'Orchimont; who, strong in the subtle confidence inspired in him by the Master-Beggar, believed in no such possibility; and who bore no friendship to the Reader.

Going to the kitchen, from which the servitors had fled, d'Orchimont lit a pine torch at the fire,

and returning, placed it in an iron sconce upon the wall. The red light revealed the terror struggling with obstinacy in the monks' dull faces. They sat in their places about the board, amid the squalid remnants of supper. One stout old monk sat hunched together with his hands folded in front of him, his eyes firmly closed, and the tears trickling in and out the folds of his countenance. The Beggars' clamour swelled louder and drew nearer, a rush of feet resounded in the passage, the door burst inward, and the next moment an uproarious crew filled the room, like a rabble at a masque: for the sacrilegists had broken open the church coffers and stolen the priestly garments; some had tied gold-embroidered stoles as streamers to their hats, others had bound gorgeous amices and copes about their loins, and one or two tripped and stumbled in rich chasubles that flowed from neck to heel.

The tones of the rat-faced Beggar shrilled above the din.

"Out you go, Fathers all! Room for the Master-Beggars! Away with them, comrades!"

The Reader got to his feet, holding aloft a little silver crucifix.

"Ye dogs and murderers," he cried, in his ringing orator's declamation. "Shall we be driven from the house of God by such devil's

spawn as ye! Slay us, rather. Our blood be on your heads for ever and ever, to damn you deep into hell."

The little black rat of a Beggar stepped in front of the Reader and snapped his fingers in the lantern face.

"Be civil, monk," he cried, "be courteous, good friar. We pay curses with slit noses, my Fathers all, and ears clipped fine. You will never make a martyr, man, not you. Out you go!"

The next moment the monks were taken ignominiously by the shoulders and hurried headlong into the passage. D'Orchimont, divested of his frock, passed unobserved, and slipped into the shadow of the door leading to the kitchens, whence the Beggars were bringing all the victuals in the place. Next they ransacked the rich cellars, heaving the contents bodily into the refectory; and crowded about the tables, lit with wax candles stuck upon the board, and reclining against the walls, the Master-Beggars began to eat and to drink with a gigantic zest. D'Orchimont regarded the orgie of demoniac and gay recklessness, that was tumbling the whole fabric of conventual tranquillity about his ears, with a huge enjoyment, the keener for a tincture of the dread which the late monk Hilarion would have experienced: and, laying hands upon some

wine and meat, he ate and drank in his corner; and found a new taste in his victuals.

Their ravenous hunger appeased, the Master-Beggars set themselves earnestly to drinking. Cask after cask of liquor was broached and poured into the silver cups and chalices of the sanctuary, into horn and flagon and black-jack: which were swiftly emptied to the memory of the dead Count Brederode, the "Great Beggar;" to the health of William of Orange, Louis and Adolphus of Nassau his valiant brothers, Jean Michiels the sacker of Reninghelst, and many another hero whose name d'Orchimont heard for the first time. In the course of an hour or so Master Philip beheld more liquor consumed by these thirty or forty Gargantuan Beggars than he had thought possible for an hundred men-at-arms to swallow upon a week's holiday.

Suddenly the rat-like Master-Beggar leaped upon the table, his black locks falling about a wax-pale face, his red-rimmed eyes like lamps, crying out in a high, broken voice the name of the Duke of Alva, Señor Don Ferdinando Alvarez de Toledo. At the sound of the name of the famous commander an extraordinary frenzy took the Beggars. They yelled like wolves; they beat upon the table; with an incoherent, sobbing execration they filled and drank, and dashed the wine-cup on the ground; they spat, and d'Orchi-

mont saw thin flakes of foam start about the shaking lips of more than one.

The terrifying figure on the table lifted its hand, and the men cried out for silence, silence for little Thibault, their darling Thibault, Thibault the orator; who thereupon began to tear words out of himself, swiftly and vehemently flinging them to right and left.

To drink to the Devil's, the Black Spy's, damnation of the Governor-General was after all but wasted liquor, and futile, began the orator. For Monseigneur Satan was known to have the instincts of a gentleman: he was tolerated, so it appeared, by God himself; while the Señor *Duque* was a thing beyond nature, a portent outside the laws of God or man, past all comprehension. The Lord of Hell would never stoop to kindle his fires for this monster; and since the Señor *Duque* had allied himself with the priesthood, the Lord of Heaven could not but stand aloof. The Master-Beggars warred with the priesthood, then, cried the ingenious Thibault, with a swift transition, albeit they recked nothing of a parcel of measly friars, who were no better than sheep. 'Twas with the bell-wethers they had to do.

The orator paused, amid a din of tipsy acclamation, took a large key from the pocket of his hose, spun it in the air, and caught it deftly.

"Dom Prior Smaragdus sits alone in his par-

lour," said he, laying the key against his nose. "Fetch me a halter from the stables, you Jean Lannoy and Houyuet;" and he bounded from the table and ran out of the chamber. The Beggars, with a murmurous clamour in which a new, red element sounded, streamed after their lieutenant. D'Orchimont shouldered his way into the thick of the press, which surged into the corridor leading to the Prior's chamber.

Thibault unlocked the door and flung it back, and d'Orchimont saw the Prior all shrunken together against the wall. His beard was wet with tears and his wide eyes stared from a face stricken suddenly old.

"Give you good-even, Dom Prior," said Thibault, politely. "Have you shriven yourself? For I think you are about to join the white-robed army of martyrs."

The Prior put his hands before his face and sobbed. Despite his old hatred, d'Orchimont's heart smote him, and he cried out.

"Will ye murder a priest? Will ye murder a priest? The Inquisition——"

But the stout robber next d'Orchimont thrust him against the wall, with a brawny elbow in his mouth, and leaned his bulk upon him.

"Take me Dom Prior," said Thibault, with a courteous gesture, "and bring him gently to the orchard."

In the crowd of wild faces, specked with shining eyes staring upon him, that filled the corridor to the throat, the Prior must have read his death. In the grasp of that furious mob all utterance and breath were stifled out of him. Now lifted off his feet, now dashed upon his knees, rent and bruised and torn by twenty clutching hands, all dabbled and streaked with blood in a moment, the Prior was swept into the garden and halted beneath the thick branches of the pear-tree, once the familiar resort of the monk Hilarion. A running noose was slipped over the priest's head. He put his hand to his throat, as the Beggars stepped back and formed a ring about him. The full moon, like a paten of gold, shone half buried in the brown, voluminous wrack; and the light, mingling with the torch-glare, gleamed for a moment upon the Prior's disfigured face. A spasm jerked his features, and passed, leaving them steady. He straightened himself. The rope drooping from his neck to the branch above him swayed slightly to and fro; beyond, in the shadow, three tall men held the other end. The voice of the river flowing beyond the wall rose upon the expectant silence. Thibault stepped out upon the little circle of greensward.

"Dom Prior Smaragdus, if you have aught to say before we send your soul to hell for orders,

you are permitted to say it, so that your last sermon is brief."

Fear had consumed the crust of the priest's nature down to its bitter core, and had suddenly died out like a fire extinguished. The Prior Smaragdus lifted up his voice and cursed the Master-Beggars by God and the Mother of God, according to formula prescribed.

"May the curse strike ye in house, barn, bed, field, road, city, castle. May ye be accursed in battle, accursed in praying, in speaking, in silence, in eating, in drinking, in sleeping. May ye be accursed in your taste, hearing, smell, and all your senses. May the curse blast your eyes, heads, and bodies, from the crowns of your heads to the soles of your feet. I conjure you, Devil, and all your imps, that you take no rest until this abominable company be brought to eternal shame; till they be destroyed by drowning or hanging, till they be torn in pieces by wild beasts or consumed by fire. Let their children become orphans, their wives widows. . . . So be it—so be it! Amen and Amen!"

He ceased. To the priest's mind, his vengeance was accomplished. An ominous murmur went up from the excommunicated and blasted Master-Beggars. D'Orchimont, the emancipated, felt his inwards turn to water within him. A man had to be a brazen atheist

or highly remarkable heretic, in those days, to face the ban ecclesiastical without blenching.

"Ye foul murderers and thieves," went on the Prior Smaragdus, dropping his voice to even and quiet tones. "I thank God there is yet one who beareth not the sword in vain. He shall peel the corrupt flesh from the bones with hooks of iron. The noble Duke of Alva——"

It was his last word. Thibault flung up his hand, and the shadow of the Prior jerked and ran back and forth upon the grass a fathom beneath his toes.

Philip d'Orchimont broke from the throng and fled into the dark Priory, choking upon a sob; for the priest, despite his revolting manners, had stood to the monk Hilarion, for years, in place of a father.

Another and a louder murmur went up from the Beggars: what with liquor and excitement and terror, some among them began to assail their lieutenant with expostulations; and Thibault found himself face to face with something of an emergency.

"What! are ye all fools as well as cursed?" he cried, in a voice that rang harsh as a sea-gull's after the orotund declamations of the churchman. "The monk may bellow curses, but can he save himself? Neither God nor Devil, look you, neither Saint nor Virgin stoops to rescue

the screaming priest. And lo! in the twinkling of an eye he is struck into dumb carrion. A yard of hemp shall do more in the twinkling of an eye than your rambling curse in twenty generations. Forward, brothers!"

He put a little silver bugle to his lips and sounded a melodious cadence. The echoes awoke far in the hills and answered, and scarcely had they died into the night when the call of a trumpet, blown in the Castle, smote a ringing repetition near at hand, and again across the valley.

"The good Castellan is coming," cried Thibault, with a cackle of laughter. "Out we go. The farce is played."

The Beggars scattered rapidly through the convent, catching up their plunder: the light of their torches glanced for a moment into the bare common-room where Hilarion leaned against the wall, his head bowed upon his arms; and the next moment the whole multitude was out of the Priory and filing in procession from the courtyard. Looking out of the window, Hilarion beheld the array, mixed with those clad in the sacerdotal vestments of scarlet and white, gold and purple, go swaying down the pleached alley of ancient trees that led from the monastery to the forest high-road, marching in time to the chant of a Beggar's song:

"De Paus en Papisten, Gods handt doet beven,
De Paus en Papisten zyn t'eynden haer raet:
De Paus en Papisten wreet boven schreven,
Ghy Paus en Papisten, soet nu oflaet."

A fantastic company of shadows flitted in and out the boles on either hand and danced amid the smoke of torches overhead upon the twining roof of branches: the echoes followed the wild voices like a fugue all down the valley, until the pageant dwindled to a glowing spot that vanished into the dark; and voices and echo became a single strain, falling thinner, and dying away among the hills.

CHAPTER V.

THE WILD-CAT.

Scarcely had the Beggars' singing fallen into silence and the night resumed her tranquil empire, when the roll of a drum and the tramp of men-at-arms marching across the bridge from the Castle broke the sombre stillness, arousing d'Orchimont to a swift consideration of the posture of his affairs. He stood between two fires, for he had renounced the cloister: in a few minutes De la Marck's soldiers would be upon him; while at the end of the road that led to freedom were the Wild Beggars of the forest. His recollection of Count Robert de la Marck revolted Hilarion as if the Castellan were a reptile: by the side of that repulsive image there swam into his mind the alluring picture of the Beggar captain who had ridden away with the lady and the waiting-woman; and, still brooding, he went out of the Priory and began to walk smartly down the avenue, in the track of the Beggars.

Beyond the *Laite* of Bouillon a rough road winds over the hills and through the forest

towards the Monastery of Saint Hubert, that lies about thirty miles to the northward. Following the track to the crest of the hill, and halting in an open space, d'Orchimont espied the red sparkle of the Beggars' torches glancing amid the branchy depths beneath him, and upon the opposite hill-side the smoke from a great fire wreathing in a lambent cloud above the trees. There was neither sign nor sound of pursuit behind the fugitive; but the spirit of adventure beckoned him forward, and he descended until the firelight glimmered through the woods on his right hand. Slipping from tree to tree, he hid behind a bush of holly on the skirts of the encampment. The Beggars had arrived from the Priory, and the place was busy as an ant-heap, the men preparing for the night amid an uproar of talk. Over the fire of brushwood an iron pot hung from a tripod of logs: a couple of men were at work cooking: a few paces distant stood a small square tent of skins; and between the tent and the fire, half in shadow and half in light, the lady of the scarlet hood and her attendant were standing together, intent upon the spectacle. A little apart, d'Orchimont perceived the Beggar captain in close talk with Thibault.

Here, then, under the stars, in the deep of the forest, was the bright vestibule to the world's

theatre; and d'Orchimont beheld it crowded with some singular actors between whom and himself fate had already woven threads of association. He had but to step into the firelight and his new life would begin. D'Orchimont still hesitated, half-consciously relishing the savour of a moment which could never recur in his experience, when a roystering Beggar passed close by the fire, and, catching sight of the women, made suddenly towards them with rapid, unsteady footsteps. He clasped the lady about the waist, and would have kissed her; but she cried out, and struggled in his grasp. The next moment d'Orchimont had awarded the gallant a buffet on the cheek that stretched him on the ground; he lay prone for a moment, then sat up, gazing stupidly at his antagonist. The hand of the Beggar captain gripped his collar and jerked him to his feet.

"Go sleep off thy liquor, sot," said the big man, dismissing his follower with a powerful impetus. "And who are you, young man? Why, 'tis my young friend the scrupulous friar, by God!"

But the ex-monk's nerves were overworn, and he could but gaze speechless into the other's great and kindly countenance. The Beggar captain considered him for a moment. D'Orchimont's face was red and white in patches; there were

black stains beneath his wide eyes. So the captain took him gently by the arm and led him aside into the shadow.

"Come, now," said The Wild-Cat, with an extraordinary kindness of voice and manner, "you are broken with fatigue and ready to faint with hunger; but you are as safe here as ever in your life; there shall no harm befall you. Tell me but who you are, why you are come, and you shall sup your fill and tumble in safe straw."

The man's tones stole about d'Orchimont's heart like wine. "Well . . . I was a monk this morning——" he answered.

"Ay?" returned the captain. "And this evening you are become a man. I understand. The passage is somewhat racking to the bones. And so you have walked from the sheep-fold at Bouillon into the wolf's lair. Well, you did very prettily but now, and to-morrow we will talk further. Now eat, and then with you to sleep."

He turned away and called to a round-faced Fleming, who presently brought the ex-monk a bowl of steaming broth and a stoup of wine: gossiped with him like a brother while he consumed the victuals; and afterwards fetched him a great cloak to sleep in. D'Orchimont sought a mossy place and lay down. The women had retired into their tent; the Beggars lay in ranks

on the ground, rolled in cloaks; the fire glowed red and flameless; beside it stood the Beggar captain, gazing into the embers; and, looking upon his sombre figure, the ex-monk fell dead asleep.

In these times of tyranny and revolution the Beggars were well accustomed to being joined by masterless and vagrant men of every degree at all times; and next morning, in the clear light and crystal air of the dawn, the ex-monk found himself breaking bread with these excommunicate sacrilegists, with an unembarrassed ease that surprised himself.

The Beggar captain waited upon the two women a little apart; and, the meal concluded, he lifted them upon their horses and mounted his own. The camp was struck, and the whole band was soon upon the march: when the captain, dropping a little to the rearward, called Hilarion to his stirrup. At a word or two from this singular person, the ex-monk found himself relating all the story of his life, the nascence of his ambition; and had d'Orchimont been his son, the Beggar captain could not have listened with a more scrupulous attention.

"Well, Master Philip d'Orchimont," said he, when the other had made an end, "it is perhaps a thousand of God's pities that you did not come to me before. You were never planned for a

monk, and yet I think you may put your claustral past to great uses in the roving future, do you know? But 'tis very necessary that you should immediately apprehend the posture of things, and in precisely what manner of company you find yourself at this moment. For the first, the condition of the land, its politics, its religion, its commerce, its prosperity, its fatal and blasting curse, may be summed up in two phrases. The one, the Señor *Duque*, the Governor-General, Don Ferdinando Alvarez de Toledo. The other, the Master-Beggars. Alva sits in Moses' seat to grind the Holy Catholic Faith into the nation, and, by the same process, to grind gold out of the nation for himself and his master, King Philip the Spoiler. Alva is the greatest captain that lives in the world; an indomitable despot, he is breaking the country in pieces with a mace of iron. Opposed to the Duke, in a deadly and inextinguishable feud, behold the Master-Beggars, a vast and motley multitude of rebels, divided into companies, each with its own captain, its own banner, pursuing separate ends; but united by a single aim, the accomplishment of freedom in religion and freedom in trade. And what can these things mean, save the conquest or the death of Alva? 'Tis the Duke of Alva or the Master-Beggars. The choice is simple, you see, d'Orchimont, but highly momentous to a

young man. Verily, a chance so splendid hath seldom arisen for ingenuous youth."

"The patriots make war upon Holy Church, it seems?" said Philip, doubtfully, his mind reverting swiftly to the cataclysm that had overtaken the Priory.

The big man shrugged his shoulders. "What would you have? The priests are art and part in the Inquisition. Besides, it is but a passing phase, this anti-monkery. And when you come to think of it, why should it be any concern of yours?"

The ex-monk pondered, gazing in front of him, where the two women rode, each with a Beggar marching at her horse's bridle; beyond, the troop swung forward in irregular ranks among the trees, the changeful light glinting on their weapons. He longed to ask whither they were bound, and upon what errand, before joining himself to the chief who drew him so strongly, but he refrained. It seemed to imply an unworthy doubt of his man.

"I should tell you, Master d'Orchimont," said the Beggar captain, as if in answer to the unspoken question, "that this company of mine is made up of adventurers, most of whom are nobles, sons of nobles, and broken gentlemen, who have attached themselves of their own will to me, and who are free to come or to go as they

please. But the while they follow me I exact an unquestioning, an implicit, an absolute obedience. At this moment we are marching for the camp of Louis of Nassau, who is raising the standard of the Red Cross in the north-east. And meanwhile, the presence of that demoiselle and her tire-woman is merely part of a scheme to gain some honest ducatoons. They are really hostages. Such is the fortune of war, you see. I think it only fair to be thus open with you."

The terms of equality upon which this bearded commander addressed the ex-monk, the insidious stimulation of his vanity, the frank appeal to his honour, conveyed in the captain's talk, made up a subtle and a most engaging form of flattery; and although d'Orchimont recognised an effect of art, his intuition of the man's sincerity was so thoroughly assured that he was entirely captivated.

"Sir," he said, "will you suffer me to trail a pike in your company? I am accustomed to obedience," added Philip d'Orchimont, recalling the monk Hilarion to dismiss that phantom into irrevocable limbo.

"I will," returned the captain. "I think you will do me service; and, since change is what you desire, I promise you that my conduct of life differs essentially from that of an high-priest.

Come," he continued, touching his horse with the spur, "let me make you known to my prisoner of war. I wish you to do an esquire's duties towards this lady."

Riding beside the lady of the scarlet hood, the Beggar captain presented Master Philip d'Orchimont to Mistress Jacqueline de Mirlamont, Countess of Durbuy. D'Orchimont wondered painfully if the lady would recognise the monk who was fishing in the Semois scarcely four-and-twenty hours since, and whom she had passed in the corridor of the convent. She gave him her hand to salute, a ceremony which he performed with much confusion, when a subtle change passed like a shadow upon her face, and she turned her shoulder towards the esquire with a slight, unmistakable gesture.

"It is singular," said Mistress Jacqueline to The Wild-Cat, "that I met a holy friar in Bouillon, yester-morn, who exactly resembled Master d'Orchimont."

The captain glanced from the girl's offended face to the ex-monk's embarrassed demeanour. "These are times," he observed, gravely, "when a sportive Providence brings many strange things to pass. Master d'Orchimont may perhaps find opportunity to explain the coincidence, since I was about to propose that he should take you under his guidance and perform the duties of

cavalier servente during the marches of our rough journey."

"As you will, sir. If he will be so good. We are prisoners, you know."

"If it is disagreeable——" began d'Orchimont, flushing hotly. "If the lady——" He stopped in a painful embarrassment. The Wild-Cat remained genially silent. Jacqueline de Mirlamont glanced at her cavalier without turning her head.

"If Master d'Orchimont will be so good, I shall be very grateful," she said, ceremoniously.

"Truly, I think Master d'Orchimont singularly fortunate," observed The Wild-Cat, blandly; and dismissing the Beggar who led the lady's horse, he rode forward. D'Orchimont, heavily conscious of disfavour in the grey eyes of the Countess, took her bridle and began to thread his way among the trees in silence. Regarding inwardly the little, honest, simple face of the maid riding behind him, with its quick look, like a bird's, and brooding upon the shade of disdain with which she had recognised him, he was taken with a strong desire to read her countenance once more. But the convent-bred youth found himself totally unable to furnish himself a sufficient reason for turning his head: until, upon coming to a rough place in the way, he was forced to do so, when he thought he surprised

an unexpected kindness in her regard. Their eyes met for a moment, and upon the instant Mistress Jacqueline began to speak.

"Can you tell me, sir, what took place at the Priory last night, after Captain Wild-Cat stole us away?" she inquired, in the tone of one who asks after the ending of a masque or a play.

D'Orchimont fell back a pace and, walking at the lady's stirrup, began to relate the events of the night before, not without certain politic omissions. The Countess hearkened with a delighted attention: and her waiting-maid, a pretty young woman with a lively eye and a wealth of curling brown hair, pressed upon the other hand of the narrator; who found this novel situation extremely gratifying.

"But can you tell me, madam," asked d'Orchimont, breaking off, "why Count Robert sent no help from the castle upon Lady de la Marck's return? Were there no men-at-arms at call?"

"On the contrary," she returned, "the Castle is as full of them as a hive of bees. But the sergeant's troop that the Count sent out when I told him how I had seen the Beggars, came in before we started for the Priory. They said they had scouted north, east, south, and west, and the only traces of the Beggars *they* could discover were their blackening fires. Yet the self-same

evening, lo! our friends here hold a *Beeldstorm* in the Priory!"

D'Orchimont thought darkly of the Count de la Marck, but he said no word of his suspicions; and passing by the hanging of Prior Smaragdus, the recruit spoke with some fervour of Captain Wild-Cat.

"I think he is a great man. I protest I love him!" cried Jacqueline. "*Dame!* I would rather be riding the woods under such a guardian than moping in Bouillon Castle with my lady and the horrible Boar, or even taking my pleasure in the palace of my uncle the Bishop, at Liége!"

"Well, and I would rather be one of his Beggars than a red cardinal of the Pope's," said d'Orchimont, looking at her.

Once more the shadow passed upon the girl's face. "But you are a renegade. Are you not a renegade—an heretic?" she said, doubtfully, and fell into an ominous silence.

Somewhat troubled in mind, d'Orchimont stepped again to the horse's head. Renegade he was, without doubt, and the word stuck in his throat: and this lady, who appeared to him as something divine, thought ill of him for his apostasy; while even his own conscience gave but a halting sanction to his violent departure. And yet, for the life of him, the ex-monk could

not discern a more excellent way than the one he had chosen.

All that day the troop of Beggars wound along a wooded valley beside the little, shallow Lesse, and at night they camped within sound of its murmur. D'Orchimont attended devoutly upon his charge: and the Countess Jacqueline showed herself always kind, even friendly, towards him; yet never wholly so. But d'Orchimont nourished the youthful fires of chivalric sentiment; had she treated him like a dog in disgrace, the esquire would still have been content with his fortune. And as it was, he rolled himself in his cloak and lay down outside the threshold of the tent that night, and could not sleep for pure, tumultuous happiness. As for Maria Desirotte, the waiting-maid, she was gay as a comedian: exchanging jests more pointed than delicate with the delighted Beggars; and entertaining them with the songs of Clément Marot and other masters.

Next day the troop continued its march by the Lesse: and d'Orchimont began to wish that this puny stream encircled the world, like the fabled Oceanus. The Beggar captain had furnished the ex-monk with the grey suit of his company, and armed him with sword and buckler, pike and pistol, with the use of which engines of war he was totally ignorant; and with the

steel buckler clanking delightfully on his sword-hilt, the esquire marched beside his Countess. Jacqueline talked to him now and again in the pleasantest manner, though always with the same reservation; while a little in front of them Maria Desirotte, with swift and practised tongue, held a half-dozen of amorous Beggars upon a befitting level of behaviour.

The Wild-Cat said but little, and seldom appeared to give an order; yet his presence was felt by every soul in his troop, like an external and irresistible conscience. Had the Beggar leader swallowed a magic potion, and become invisible and deprived of speech, it would have made no jot of relaxation in his discipline.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW MASTER PHILIP D'ORCHIMONT GAVE HIS PONIARD TO THE COUNTESS JACQUELINE.

Towards evening, when the western sky began to brighten beyond the hills, and the little river to ripple through reflected, golden patches into a shadowy silence, a thudding of hoofs arose upon the quiet air, drew nearer, and a horseman burst from the woods on the opposite bank and splashed his horse into the stream.

"Hola, the Beggars, the Beggars!" he shouted. "Hola, comrades! Tidings from France!"

"Hola, Sang-Bouillant," cried The Wild-Cat.

He drew rein, and the whole troop crowded together upon the bank, gazing at the squat figure on the great white horse, plunging across the iridescent water in a pother of glowing light and flying spray.

"*Vivent les Gueux!*" shouted the rider; and, plucking off his bonnet and rising in his stirrups, he holloed till the wood and water rang.

Reaching the bank, the stranger bowed to Mistress Jacqueline, who was regarding him

with a vivid attention; and, dismounting, he embraced the Beggar captain.

"Well met, my prince of cats!" he cried. "Methought I should fall across you. But a tot of wine, dear brother, for the love of God. I have the thirst of a damned German. . . . Well, the Huguenots have signed the peace with the King. Signed themselves to the devil, at Chartres, but two days since. Delivered themselves over bound to the mercy of the Medicis at last, by God's rattle! No more help from Gaul for the Beggars. We must massacre the Blackbeards all alone for the Huguenots, my gallant. But what then? *Vivent le roi et les Gueux!*" and he drank a great draught of wine.

Sang-Bouillant, the famous messenger who carried despatches at that time between the chief Beggars and the Huguenot leaders in France, and who had gained his sobriquet by reason of the explosive energy and indomitable vigour that dwelt in the man, stood looking up at The Wild-Cat, the silver goblet clutched in his hand, talking, between gulps of wine, in a fury of gesticulation; his features darkly flushed, his eyes alight, his black hair and beard bristling, in a flame of excitement. The Beggars gathered close about Sang-Bouillant while he poured forth his tidings; for in that free company no secret was made of intelligence.

Thirteen thousand German Protestants, it appeared, led by the Duke Palatine Casimir, had invaded France to reinforce the Huguenots: whereupon the Queen-Mother, Catherine de Medici, in some alarm, began to reconsider her plans; and presently to open the negotiations with the Huguenot leaders, Condé and the Admiral Coligny, by means of which the peace of Chartres was concluded on the twenty-third of March, 1568. The German riders and lanzknechts, who had come to France for the sake of the true religion and for what they could get, had then to be reckoned with on their own account; and it was bruited about, said Sang-Bouillant, that for fifteen thousand gold crowns, Duke Casimir would consent to depart in peace. So that the Huguenots, being reconciled to the King of France, who was himself at one with King Philip of Spain, and themselves standing no longer in need of further aid from the Low Countries, found it impossible to send levies to reinforce the Netherland patriots in their unending campaign against the Duke of Alva, save perhaps a free company or two of Huguenot gentlemen. "The Huguenot dogs," said Sang-Bouillant, "are packing into Blois so fast as they can, to ruffle it at court and outface the Catholics, for which dissipations they will presently have to pay down the devil's own

price, by God's wounds, so they will. But Count d'Arenberg has gone a-wooing Mademoiselle de Châteauneuf: took horse before the ink was dry on the charter of peace; and by now, Our Lady grant it, she has the ardent general fast in a net."

"So much the better for Louis of Nassau," said The Wild-Cat; for the Count d'Arenberg, one of the few Low Country nobles who held service with the Duke of Alva, was a formidable commander; whom, during the preceding year, Alva had despatched against the Huguenots, at the head of three thousand five hundred mercenaries; and whose return with this force was a peril to be anticipated by the Beggar leaders.

At this critical pass of affairs, when the Prince of Orange and Louis of Nassau were selling the very plate from their tables for money to raise an armament, the defection of the Huguenots, even to d'Orchimont, appeared a momentous loss; but observing keenly the demeanour of those two redoubtable conspirators, The Wild-Cat and Sang-Bouillant, d'Orchimont could not perceive that their courage was a single jot abated.

Having made an end of his news, Sang-Bouillant administered some wine and some pieces of meat to his horse, got into the saddle, and vanished into the woods at a gallop.

The Wild-Cat turned to his men. "*Messieurs les Gueux*," he cried, and instantly the Beggars fell into silence and fixed their eyes upon the speaker. "*Messieurs les Gueux*, since the Frenchmen have fallen aside and made a pact of ignoble peace, it seems that we must strike the first blow in this war alone. The loss is great. Why should we deny it? But, *Messieurs les Gueux*, let us call to mind that for centuries the Netherlanders have fought for life alone against every nation under heaven, against tyrants great and little, against God's sea itself; and alone they have conquered!" The Beggars cried out with one voice; the speaker lifted his hand and continued. "Now behold us leagued against the most puissant empire of the world, against a commander mighty as Cæsar; once more, for the greater honour, we fight alone; and once more, be it soon or be it late, alone we shall conquer. And I think, gentlemen," cried The Wild-Cat, "I think it should be soon."

The Beggars burst into a great cheering as the captain dismounted and went up to Mistress Jacqueline to help her from her saddle; and d'Orchimont felt his heart burn at his leader's swelling words, and his spirit waxing the greater within him, the more tremendous appeared the contest in which he was enlisted.

The camp was pitched that night upon a grassy

knoll, from which the trees stood back in a half circle. After supper, The Wild-Cat, with Mistress Jacqueline, d'Orchimont, and the lieutenant Thibault (whom the ex-monk both detested and admired), sat about one of the fires; Maria Desirotte, the waiting-woman, having gone to the other, where she sat amid a select band of her courtiers.

The Beggar captain began to talk: holding the golden discourse of a man gifted with an insatiable appetite for all that life affords of warfare, of art, of love: who took all with a strong hand, and gave all with an abounding generosity; and who, perfectly acquainted with every terrifying eventuality of existence, pursued his course, in the face of constant and innumerable dangers, with an unfaltering serenity. In the glow of his conversation his listeners insensibly caught fire, delighted with the fervour of their own convictions: which were, it seemed, suddenly revealed to themselves; and astonished at the aptness of their own occasional observations.

D'Orchimont lay down in front of his charges' tent that night with a brain alight and singing: he thought he noted a fraction more of friendship in Mistress Jacqueline's manner towards him, a fraction less of distrust; and the reflection repeated itself in his mind like a refrain. She begins to realise the quality of our enterprise, thought d'Orchimont, reasoning with the

facile assurance of youth; Mistress Jacqueline begins to perceive the soldier and to forget the renegade, exactly as I do myself.

He was drowsing asleep upon this sweet consideration, when a faint, clanking rustle, like the rubbing of steel upon steel, stole upon his consciousness, mingled with the babble of the river, and he sat up. The face of the moon was now obscured and again revealed by drifting clouds, and in the passing silver illumination d'Orchimont perceived the sentry standing on the bank of the stream some fifty yards below, his head bowed to one side in an attitude of profound attention. The next moment, with an echoing explosion, a spout of fire leapt from the shadows of the further bank, and the sentry sprang into the air and fell prone with his face in the water. A veil of blackness descended, as shot after shot blazed from the woods, and the bullets flew screaming into the camp: a great noise of shrieks and cries arose; and in an instant the whole troop was afoot and running hither and thither. The bugle of the Beggar captain sounded the call to arms, and his voice rang high, ordering the men to form in line, with loaded arquebuses, and to lie down. The smouldering fires emitted light enough to enable a man to distinguish his fellow at a few yards' distance, and the manœuvre was swiftly executed. D'Orchimont stood at his post,

pike in hand, assailed by terror, but staunchly resisting it, and exhorting the women within the tent to remain still.

The firing had ceased, when the darkness rolled off again like a curtain, revealing the double rank of Beggars lying upon their weapons: The Wild-Cat, sword in hand, seated on horseback in front of them; and midway across the stream a troop of mounted Spanish men-at-arms, equipped in complete armour, the moonlight slanting upon their silent figures, so that they moved half in light and half in a wave of shadow. The Beggar captain gave the word to fire. A volley rang out with a formidable explosion, the shot rattling upon the Spaniards' armour and wounding several horses, which began to plunge and rear, throwing the troop into some disorder. The Wild-Cat instantly gave the word to charge, and, crying "*Vivent les Gueux!*" struck spurs in and rode headlong down the slope, followed by the Beggars shouting their war-cry, their brandished swords lightening above their heads. The light was blotted out once more, and a confused uproar and the clash of hand-to-hand fighting came up from the river. The heady ecstasy of battle entered into d'Orchimont; he shouted aloud, and scarce able to keep himself from plunging into the mellay, strained his eyes into the darkness.

Presently the light began to steal abroad again, and d'Orchimont made out a weltering mob of fighting men and horses: but the Spaniards were pressing the Beggars back upon the bank; and below a dam of writhing men and horses the stream glinted darkly in the moonshine. D'Orchimont saw a figure on a white horse break free from the further side of the Spanish troop, clamber upon the bank, and halt there. The next moment the call of the Beggar captain's bugle rang above the din, and The Wild-Cat galloped a little way up the bank and recrossed the stream as the Beggars gave way all at once and began to run, tailing after The Wild-Cat, who was riding towards the woods across the lower slopes of the knoll. The whole body of the Spaniards followed hard after them, and d'Orchimont perceived that the Beggar captain's manœuvre was designed to draw the pursuit away from the camp. He felt a hand upon his arm. Mistress Jacqueline stood beside him, with Maria Desirotte clinging to her.

"Will you give me your poniard, sir, if you please?" she said. "The Spaniards are upon us, is it not so? Give me your poniard, quick."

The face of Mistress Jacqueline was small and wan in the dim light, and fear looked out of her eyes; but she seemed to retain command upon herself. D'Orchimont unhooked his dagger and

gave it to her; and as he did so, he perceived a small body of horsemen detach themselves from the troop and, wheeling, come charging straight up the slope towards the camp. A shock of terror fell upon d'Orchimont, and passed, leaving him bereft of sensation and fixed in resolution.

"Run, hide yourselves in the woods," he said, rapidly, "the while I keep them from the tent."

The Spaniards were scarce thirty yards distant; the ground quivered under the galloping hoofs, and d'Orchimont felt the grasp tighten on his arm.

"Go!" he cried, desperately. "Go—you *shall* go, then!" and he thrust the women from him, saw them vanish into the shadows, and turned to confront the billow of towering figures sweeping down upon him. The foremost Spaniard, whirling a mace about his helm, rode full upon d'Orchimont, who thrust swiftly with his pike at the gap in the steel panoply where the eyes in the black face looked out under the visor. The mace beat down the pike in the ex-monk's unpractised hands; a flash of fire seemed to burst in his head, and he fell senseless.

D'Orchimont came out of his swoon to find himself lying upon his back, being transported over uneven ground: a burning hammer beat in his head and all his bones ached; and looking

up at the dim sky for a moment, a horrible fear seized the ex-monk that he was dead, and that fiends conveyed him into the abysses of hell. Upon the back of this terror thronged a thousand dim remembrances, with which his tortured mind wrestled during an infinite period, until the motion ceased, his bearers set him down, and he instantly fell into a troubled sleep.

The sun falling warm on his cheek awoke him: he came gradually to his senses; and sitting up on his couch of leafless heather, d'Orchimont looked giddily about him. His head felt very sore beneath a heavy bandage, but the wound had ceased to ache and the fever had left him. Close at hand, The Wild-Cat reclined upon his elbow, eating and drinking with a good appetite; his head was bound about with a linen cloth like a turban, and his shoulder was bandaged: next to the Beggar captain sat Thibault, presenting a most villainous aspect with a bandage over his eye; and about an open, rocky glade upon the summit of a hill lay the remnant of the Beggar company, no more than a score of men, of whom nearly all wore stained wrappings about one or more wounds. The most of them were asleep, a few were breaking their fast on cold victuals, and two or three lay tossing ceaselessly to and fro and moaning. There was no sign of either the Countess or her waiting-

woman, and d'Orchimont felt the most deadly misgivings as to their safety.

"Aha!" cried The Wild-Cat, looking up, "*à la bonne heure!* The monk and death have parted for the nonce, then. Bring victuals to the friar, Thibault. Let us fortify the carnal man;" and the Beggar captain filled a cup of wine and brought it to d'Orchimont. Despite his wounds, and the night's toil and fighting, the captain's great ruddy face glowed beneath his blood-stained turban, and his eye shone alert as ever. "So you have tasted blood at last, my fiery cenobite," continued The Wild-Cat. "'Tis your own, 'tis true; but that is no more than the fortune of war."

D'Orchimont drank the wine and felt instantly revived.

"Where are Mistress Jacqueline and her woman?" he asked, diffidently.

"Set your chivalrous soul at rest," returned the Beggar captain. "They have come by no harm, although at this moment I have no doubt madam Countess rideth gently beside the Spanish captain, the while his ruffians are drawing swords upon each other for the possession of the charming Maria. Jacques Chariot there tracked the Blackbeards to the doors of Saint Hubert's Monastery, while we were fetching a compass back to the camp to bring off the wounded.

They had picked up the women and were using them with all courtesy. Mistress Jacqueline de Mirlamont, Countess of Durbuy, is far too fine a jewel, in too gaudy a setting, to be lightly spoiled: moreover, she is under the Señor *Duque's* protection; Alva's thunderbolts guard her: and what more would you have?"

"The Duke of Alva? Is there an affair in the world in which this god intermeddles not? I do not understand. How can they be safe?" said d'Orchimont, troubled and bewildered.

"Come," said The Wild-Cat, "eat and drink, and I will read you the riddle. Hearken. The matter lieth thus. The Governor-General's avarice is insatiable: his emissaries pry into all the corners of the land, scenting out gold; and so it comes to the Duke's ears that his Holiness of Liége hath a rich marriage at disposal; whereupon the Duke incontinently requests the Bishop to bestow his ward and her great possessions upon a kinsman of his own. Now, Liége is an excellent good old man, a Fleming of high descent, with a fine natural distaste of the Spaniard: he could not accept, he could not refuse, this indigestible proposition; and so, to gain him time, my Lord Bishop sends Mistress Jacqueline to his castle of Bouillon, commanding his Castellan, De la Marck, to hold her in safe keeping—praying, you see, that the Boar might, just for the

nonce, fulfil his duty. 'Twas a desperate petition, and perfectly futile. For although De la Marck, who cares nothing for the Spaniard—and could hold the Castle of Bouillon though half the Duke's army were to march up the Bishop's Meadow and sit down before his battlements—although De la Marck, I say, would never play the Bishop false with Alva, he speedily conceived a plan to turn affairs to his own profit. The Boar came privily to me. He said, 'If you, my friend, will carry off this little Countess, and extort a ransom from old Liége, you shall take one half the monies, and I will take the other.' But I told De la Marck that the proportion was totally inadequate; since I must put myself to a vast deal of trouble and encounter the most serious dangers, while himself had nought to do but stuff his Lordship full of exculpatory falsehoods—an exercise to which he was well accustomed. So De la Marck offered me to sack the Priory in addition. In the sequel you have yourself assisted."

D'Orchimont began to comprehend the posture of affairs: a profound commiseration filled him for the helpless girl who was bandied to and fro between these ruthless forces; and it occurred to the ex-monk that this heroic Beggar used a wide interpretation of morality.

"And now?" he said, after a little silence.

"And now," returned The Wild-Cat, "since these gentlemen broke their shins over us in the dark, we but take a new road to the self-same bourne. Fortune sets Jacqueline de Mirlamont to serve our turn, that by her means we may get money from Liége, whose bishopric has for centuries sucked wealth from the country. Now, look you, instead of saying to the Bishop, For so much you shall have your niece again, we shall go to his Lordship and say, Monseigneur, the ravening Spanish have stolen away your ward; give us so much and we will recover your lost sheep for you. Do you not see, d'Orchimont," continued the big man, with a strong emphasis, and beating upon his knee with a clenched fist, "do you not see, that 'tis all a matter of adaptation—of the shaping of means to ends? Life is a campaign for the sake of an idea, not a problem in geometry to be solved by the application of axioms. You and I are about a great business, are we not? We travel and toil and make war for the deliverance of a nation."

"Yes," said d'Orchimont, and paused. "But I think——" he added, in a painful embarrassment, "it seems to me—that I am charged with another business, too. Have you not made the welfare of the Countess of Durbuy my business?"

"Very well," returned The Wild-Cat. "Why not? Pursue the enterprise. Since I am bound

to get the lady from the Spaniards, 'tis like we may help one another."

"And what will you do next?" enquired d'Orchimont, eagerly.

"We go to visit my Lord the Bishop. Afterwards we shall act according as events fall out. I think that even impetuous youth would scarce advise pursuit of mailed cavalry with this tattered array."

"But I may go alone?" said d'Orchimont.

"To what end?" asked the captain, regarding him.

"Who knows?" the ex-monk answered, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well, go then, since you will not be content else. At least, you will get experience. Hide pistols and a poniard beneath your frock. And now let me look to your broken head."

The wound was not dangerous; and although he was bruised in every part, d'Orchimont rose, and after putting on the frock of a mendicant friar (which the Beggars carried in their baggage amongst other disguises), and receiving from The Wild-Cat orders to rejoin the band near Liége at a certain time and place, he took a stout staff in his hand and set forth.

D'Orchimont had no clear design in view. The chivalric impulses proper to his time of life carried him blindly forward upon a wild errand.

All day he journeyed eastward through the forest, steering by the sun, leaving the Monastery of Saint Hubert on his right hand: for, according to the Beggar captain, the Spaniards would probably direct their course from thence towards Brussels; and should they do so, the troop would in all likelihood travel up the valley of the Ourthe until they left the forest of the Ardennes behind them. The thought of Mademoiselle Jacqueline in the power of the Spaniards fretted d'Orchimont like a wound: he began to make desperate and futile plans for her rescue; and as he went, the ex-monk prayed to God with an unwonted fervour on behalf of His most choice and precious creation, the Countess Jacqueline.

Towards evening the pilgrim came out upon the heights of Nadrin, and looked northward upon a great field of dark hills. Like a serpent, the river coiled shining about their foundations: and brooding on further summits was fold upon fold of blue vapour, illumined now and again by a shimmer of lightning; imaging to the mind of d'Orchimont the burden of oppression that gloomed upon his country. Far off, in the very bosom of the wrack, a red spark flamed suddenly to sight and blazed swiftly into a disastrous pyre. The Spaniards had fired a village as they passed through it, according to their custom, and so d'Orchimont knew that he had fallen upon

their track. He lay that night on a bed of heather, in a fir-wood from whose recesses came the dolorous calling of owls, like the voices of sorrowful spirits strayed to earth; and slept at once, despite the aching of his head and his bruises.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MONK HILARION TAKES A CAST OF HIS OLD OFFICE.

Barred with gold and scarlet and purple, transmuting the solitary street of the village into a pathway of beaten gold that ran between black heaps of smoking ruin, the radiant east shone full into d'Orchimont's face as he climbed from the woods out upon the cultivated hill-top. Through the profound stillness of the dawn fell the mournful howling of a dog. As he drew nearer, d'Orchimont made out the figures of peasants digging among the wreck of houses that cut black notches upon the bright field of the sky; and presently, with a strong shudder, he stumbled upon the body of a man lying with his face in the dust of the pathway, a ragged spear-wound between his shoulders.

D'Orchimont could give no help or consolation to the wretched villagers; and, fearing to be delayed by them, he turned aside and descended the shoulder of the hill into the valley of the Ourthe. All day long he followed the shallow stream that wound amid the fragrant hills of

woodland, finding a broad track of hoofs upon the soft grass: until, at nightfall, he descried a spangle of lights in front of him; and leaving his companion the river to babble alone into the darkness, the pilgrim entered the dirty, crowded village of La Roche. The inhabitants were all within doors: and as d'Orchimont passed up the narrow street of tall, coloured houses, here and there the lighted rooms showed like pictures framed in the unshuttered windows: in which, perhaps, a man in a great black hat would be smoking by the ingle, and leaning towards him in the shadow, a brown-faced woman in her blue peasant's dress; or a sedate family would be seated at supper about a table, beneath a dusky lamp.

The other end of the street gives upon the main entrance of the Castle,* a strong place of espial built by the Counts of La Roche upon the rocky heights above the shallow and bright river which makes a loop about the town. Beneath the deep arch that joined the two round towers of the gateway, a couple of halberdmen were lounging in the smoky light of a torch stuck in the wall. Quaking inwardly, but stoutly resolved, d'Orchimont went up with a great assumption of boldness and requested a night's lodging for the monk Hilarion. The sentries greeted him with much good-humour in the

* The ruins remain to-day.

Flemish tongue and craved the friar's blessing; and one of them led him up the wide flight of rock-hewn steps to the inner gateway and consigned the visitor to another man-at-arms; who escorted him into a great stone chamber, where a numerous company was assembled at supper. Torches flared and smoked in iron sconces about the lower part of the hall, and the walls rang with the noise of talking and the clatter of knives. D'Orchimont, with his hood drawn over his brows, shot a glance across the feeding ranks to the daïs, and his heart leaped and his limbs tingled; for, shining in the light of the wax candles that adorned the high table, he saw the round, fair head of Mistress Jacqueline. The man-at-arms gave the friar a place beneath the great pewter vessel of salt, and, wishing him a good appetite, left him. D'Orchimont ate and drank, took note of the company about him, and wondered what would happen next. The second of the two long trestle tables that occupied nearly the whole length of the hall was entirely filled with the black-visaged Spanish troopers, while that at which d'Orchimont sat was crowded with Flemish men-at-arms and Flemish guests. An aversion inherent in the blood of the two races kept them separate. At the high table Mistress Jacqueline sat between the bald, little, fat man at the head of the board, and a swarthy,

dignified gentleman wearing the Order of the Golden Fleece over his embroidered doublet. Next the latter was a grey-haired lady in a ruff, and beside her sat a priest in a black silk robe. Upon the other side of the host were several flaxen-haired, buxom ladies, and stout Flemish burghers in furred gowns. Presently the ladies at the high table rose and, with a deep courtesy, quitted the hall by a door at the upper end. The priest came down the room towards d'Orchimont, who got to his feet and requested the Chaplain's blessing.

"*Benedicite*," returned the priest. "Be seated, my son, and fill yourself a cup of wine." And sitting down beside d'Orchimont, the Chaplain enquired who he was and whence he came.

D'Orchimont, having so far prepared his story, replied that he was bound for the Monastery of Saint Hubert, with a message from the Abbot to the Bishop of Liége; and hearing that a troop of Spanish cavalry were travelling in the same direction, added the monk Hilarion, with a sudden inspiration, he had come to the Castle of La Roche to pray for protection on the road, since the Wild Beggars were ravaging the country. The conventual fear of a priest, enforced upon d'Orchimont for so long, stirred within him as he lied, and the renegade monk heard his own voice ring false and felt that his

face betrayed him; but the Chaplain's narrow eyes looked down and his sombre countenance remained perfectly immobile.

"I will prefer your request to the Señor Captain, my son, or you may do so yourself," said the Chaplain. "But is it not in the Rule," he added, "that no Brother should go alone upon a journey?" And he glanced up suddenly from under his heavy brows. D'Orchimont cursed himself for not having forestalled this emergency. He hesitated. The Chaplain lowered his eyelids and waited.

"Pardon, Father," said d'Orchimont; "I did not perfectly understand your question."

The Chaplain gravely repeated it.

"Certainly," replied d'Orchimont, hardly knowing what he said. "Brother — Brother Thibault set out with me; but the fear of the Wild Beggars constrained him to turn back."

"Aye?" said the Chaplain. "The Beggars are a curse indeed. But come up higher, my son, and I will make you known to the Count de la Roche, whose guest you are;" and he led d'Orchimont to the high table. "Sir Count," continued the Chaplain, "the Brother Hilarion from Saint Hubert's Abbey prays the Señor Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova to safe-conduct him towards Liége."

"I bid you welcome, Father," returned the

Count. "Will you drink? Take Brother Hilarion with you, Señor," said the stout little Fleming, turning to the Spaniard, "and you will be perfectly equipped according to your nation's custom in war: a company of courtesans on the one flank and a posse of priests on t'other, eh? Is it not so?"

"Count, your talent for jesting is too admirable," said the Spaniard, gravely. "But I can scarce forbear to remind you with whom, upon this mission, I have the honour to ride."

"Señor, you are too serious," retorted the Count. "But let it pass. Who comes now? Another priest, *mordieu!*"

For at this moment a knot of delighted men-at-arms burst into the hall at the lower end, clustered about a gesticulating monk with a bandage over one eye, who was talking at the top of his voice. With a shock, d'Orchimont recognised the shrill tones of Thibault.

"How many, do you ask me?" he was crying. "*Sapristi!* an hundred, two hundred, a thousand! What do I know? As many as the trees of the wood. The Beggars fill the woods like a nation of ravening wolves, *par le cordieu!* There is no escaping the wild, bloody, sacrilegious, merciless dogs of Beggars. Look at my head, comrades. Regard this bloody clout. Beneath it, you shall behold my brains a-beating. The Beggars have

defaced the image of God, *pardieu!* After supper I will curse them with the Great Excommunication, that shall blast and wither them upon their ungodly feet. There is no restriction of space or time to your excellent curse."

"Hola, sirrah, come up higher!" shouted the Count de la Roche.

The men-at-arms and servitors who were clearing the tables crowded together, looking after Thibault, who marched up the centre of the hall, his eye gleaming beneath the shade of his bandage. Upon catching sight of d'Orchimont he made a bound forward and flung his arms about his neck.

"Brother Hilarion!" cried Thibault. "Dear Brother Hilarion! Oh, Brother, I had thought you with your Maker! Bear me out in my part, dear child," he whispered in d'Orchimont's ear; and, releasing him, turned towards the Count, who was regarding this portent with open mouth.

"Sir Count," said Thibault, "*Benedicite.* I crave your indulgence towards me. Father, your blessing. (*Deo gratias.*) I have but now, and as by a miracle, escaped from the bloody clutches of the accursed Beggars; and lo! my brother who was lost, is found. And now for the roast veal, for I have the hunger of Charles Quint, my Father, and the rest of my relations in the faith here present," concluded the impostor,

looking blandly about him, his hands clasped upon his belt.

"*Morbleu!* I have never seen a priest like you," said the Count de la Roche, with a broad smile upon his rubicund face. "Sit down and eat your fill, in God's name, and afterwards you shall tell us of these same Beggars."

"And by what miracle you are so happily escaped," said the Chaplain, who was regarding the stranger with a very dark countenance.

"By a miracle of courage and dexterity, in brief, my Father," retorted Thibault, with his mouth full.

"Sirrah, you are of the *Grovagi*, the vagabond monks who cause a perpetual scandal to Holy Church. Deny it not," said the Chaplain, glancing at the reckless Thibault. "And you also, Dom Hilarion," he added, turning suddenly upon d'Orchimont.

"Let be, Chaplain, let be," interposed the jovial Count. "My house is not a convent, and these gentlemen are my guests. What! Shall a monk be damned because he has the good manners to entertain the company, Chaplain?" said the Count, looking at his spiritual adviser; whereupon the priest arose from his seat with a formidable dignity and quitted the hall. The Count looked after the incensed ecclesiastic until the door had closed behind him, when he settled

himself in his chair with an air of relief. The Spaniard stroked his beard, and the Flemish burghers endeavoured to dissemble their embarrassment. Thibault continued to eat with the utmost unconcern, while d'Orchimont regarded him with terror.

"Come, now, tell us of your misfortunes, friar," said the Count, filling his goblet with wine and pushing the flagon towards Thibault.

"Most willingly, Count. The story is brief and sad. Hearken to a tale of deadly crime. The day before yesterday, walking soberly through the forest, beguiling the way with psalms and hymns, and discoursing upon spiritual matters—you cannot but remember, Brother, the point I raised—" said Thibault, droning through his nose, and turning to d'Orchimont.

"Very clearly. We were discussing the remarkable opinion of Saint Hildegarde of blessed memory, who taught that the holy Saint Benedict, in prohibiting the eating of flesh, meant thereby the flesh of quadrupeds only, and *not* the flesh of fowls," answered d'Orchimont at a venture.

"And many have been burnt for less," remarked the Spanish captain.

"Continue, friar. I want to hear your story," said the Count. "Try and forget Saint Hildegarde for a few moments, if you please."

"This venison is most excellent, sir Count," continued Thibault, cheerfully. "Well, of a sudden, in the twinkling of an eye (as saith Holy Writ), we found ourselves surrounded by Wild Beggars on every side—swashbuckling devils in grey, wearing sword and buckler, and mustachios a cubit long; oh, horrible fellows! Brother Hilarion here escaped by good running and the blessing of Saint Peter on his heels; but as for me, they smote me on the head, as you may see, bound my anointed person with cords, and haled me along with blasphemies. These damned sacrilegists would have tortured and slain me that night, and, indeed, had already cut my bonds to begin, when, God be praised, by good luck a party of Spanish horse burst upon the Beggars and drove them like chaff before the wind; I trust so, at least, for I tarried not to see, but incontinently fled into the forest. And so, sir Count, behold me here. I drink to your health, Count."

"I think, friar, that, under Providence, I myself was the humble instrument of your salvation," said the Spaniard.

"Truly?" said Thibault. "Then be assured, Señor, I shall not forget the circumstance."

The Count de la Roche was charmed with his guest, and sat drinking and talking with him for a long time: a period of intolerable tedium

to d'Orchimont, who sat in continual dread of his reckless companion's conversation. At length the Count summoned the Major-domo, who conducted the pair to their sleeping apartment and left them.

Thibault sat upon the edge of his couch and yawned. "Well, Brother," said he, "and how do you do? Methought you would be lonely, perhaps, so I walked across the forest, and here I am."

"It comes into my mind that the Inquisition will lay the pair of us by the heels in consequence," said d'Orchimont, gloomily. "You do not know the priesthood, Thibault."

"You mean the sulky Chaplain here? *Peste!* I care not a groat for his black face. But are the women here, d'Orchimont?"

"They are lodging somewhere in the Castle. But where?"

"Shall we carry them off?" asked Thibault, cocking his uncovered eye at d'Orchimont.

"What do you mean?"

"Precisely that. I know all the mazes of this old fox-earth of a fortalice, and there is an underground passage that runs into the high-road at a point a mile hence."

D'Orchimont looked at the little, alert man with the shrewish face and the bright eye, and hesitated.

"Come," said Thibault, "I will be frank with you; I am seriously enamoured of Maria Desirotte. Help me, and I will help you."

"But how to accomplish such a thing?" said d'Orchimont, who required scant persuasion to seek adventure.

"O we must find a way," answered Thibault, getting to his feet. "Shall we about it?"

"With all my heart," said d'Orchimont. Quitting their chamber, Thibault led the way down steps and along vaulted passages, where shone a flickering light from the torches that were stuck in the wall where the corridors intersected, towards the lowest story of the Castle. Now and again the sham friars met a man-at-arms or a servant of the household, who muttered the customary mechanical petition for their blessing as he passed; but at that late hour of the night the stone corridors were for the most part empty, although lights were still shining through the crevices of the doors opening off the passages. Presently the two emerged upon a small, very high, octagonal hall, illumined by a great brass lamp, wrought in the form of a ship, which was suspended by chains from the centre of the groined ceiling. Near a half-open door stood a group of tire-women and bower-maidens; and the murmur of their talk echoed about the chamber as though the solid walls

chattered and whispered. D'Orchimont's glance, travelling swiftly across the strange faces that turned towards him as he entered, lighted instantly upon the eager gaze of Maria Desirotte. A flash of recognition passed upon her countenance for a moment; but the waiting-woman was much of an actress, and suffered no expression of surprise to escape her. D'Orchimont was about to pause, when he felt Thibault grasp his arm.

"Aye, Brother," said Thibault, loudly, and as if continuing a conversation, "and now I bethink me, I have a helpful word or so to bestow upon two or three poor devils of men-at-arms down in the guard-room. Wilt thou come with me into the casemate?"

As he spoke, they entered another passage which yawned opposite to the one by which they had entered the hall.

"What excellent luck!" continued Thibault. "I will wager a ducat that the excellent Maria finds a way to gain speech of us."

"But will she bring her mistress?"

"Pray that she may," said Thibault, piously.

The passage branched off at right angles into a gulf of blackness, from the depths of which a square of red glowed behind a grating, like a gigantic eye behind a visor.

"If I mistake not," whispered Thibault,

pausing, "yon is the Question Chamber. Let us go softly and look through the wicket."

The pair stole quietly up to the door, in which the wicket opened at the height of a man's face, and peered through the bars into the vast stone chamber. A strong red glow shone from an iron brazier that stood near at hand; a little beyond, two candles burned in silver candlesticks upon a table draped in lustreless black, at which was seated the Chaplain of the Castle, writing busily. The candles, which shone isolated like stars upon the huge shadows beyond, gleamed upon the priest's narrow countenance, with the black eyebrows slanting upon the long nose, as he bent over his parchment. Not without emotion, the two adventurers took note of the wooden bed that stood conveniently near the brazier, equipped with iron collars and leathern straps, and the iron instruments of torture dimly revealing themselves upon the walls, winking in the firelight; when the figure of a man came out of the darkness and stood gazing into the furnace. His huge arms were bare to the shoulder, his face was gross and hairless, and, save for a tawny fringe, he was totally bald. His countenance, thought d'Orchimont, would have been as void of expression as a whitewashed wall, were it not for his eyes, which glistened like a pair of black beads stuck into a bladder of lard.

The same terror possessed both Thibault and d'Orchimont at the same moment, and they drew back. D'Orchimont felt his hand seized by his companion, who knocked with it upon d'Orchimont's breast and then upon his own. At this sinister confirmation of his fears, the perspiration broke out upon d'Orchimont with a freezing chill. With his other hand Thibault groped about the door with intent to secure it against these formidable inquisitors, but finding neither key nor bolt, the pair crept quaking down the passage, rounded the corner into the friendly torchlight, and sped as rapidly as they dared down winding steps and turning corridors into the casemate, a chamber hollowed from the bastion of rock that descended towards the river. They entered the casemate from the side: to the left, a faint irradiation fell through an archway which gave upon an inner chamber leading to the guard-room, from whence came a noise of talk and laughter: from the right, the night air blew coldly through an archway opening upon a rocky platform, to which a flight of steps ascended; and which communicated with the ramparts by another stairway outside. As soon as his vision became accustomed to the gloom, d'Orchimont discerned a blot of darkness upon the opposite wall, towards which Thibault led him, and the two men ensconced

themselves within the black shadow of the subterranean passage.

"*Mon Dieu!*" muttered Thibault, panting, "to think of that dog of a priest! I will have his blood, be it soon or be it late. And, meanwhile, if the wenches come not speedily we shall certainly be carbonadoed by him."

He laughed, folded his arms, settled himself against the wall, and fell silent.

The wind sighed without the walls, the noise in the guard-room within rose and fell in faint reverberations, and somewhere in the darkness a dropping of water plashed monotonously. A chilling draught blew up the tunnel, and d'Orchimont shivered and drew his monk's frock close about him. Through the arched opening he could descry a segment of sky pricked with a tiny pattern of stars above a piece of battlemented wall, upon which some tufted grass and a single flower were swaying in the breeze.

In the stress of that suspense a blind impulse towards prayer, and, at the same moment, a dim presentiment of counter-considerations, rose in d'Orchimont's mind. The chain of tiny circumstances which must bring the inquisitors at a certain moment was already forged; would any one of the sacred hierarchy stoop from heaven to snap a link? It appeared highly improbable. Then his consciousness relaxed and fell away

from reflection: and was permeated, now and again, by a tinge of anticipation supernaturally sweet; yet dashed by the sour conviction that the supreme happiness of esquiring so marvellous a creature as the Lady Jacqueline through the wild forest, were a possibility too high for mundane fulfilment.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRIDGE OF THE IRON CRUCIFIX.

At last, two hooded figures appeared upon the patch of sky beyond the open archway at the end of the vaulted chamber.

"*Vivent les Gueux!*" muttered Thibault; a tiny echo rippled round the walls: at the sound, the women cautiously descended the steps into the casemate; and the four came together in the middle of the floor.

"*A la bonne heure, mesdemoiselles!*" said Thibault.

"Malapert!" returned Maria Desirotte.

"Master d'Orchimont?" said the Countess. The Master-Beggar could make nothing of her level accents.

"Madam, I came hither to know if I could do you any service," he said.

"I thank you, sir. But I do not lack protectors," answered Jacqueline.

"My beautiful one," said Thibault to Maria Desirotte, while d'Orchimont stood mute and confounded, "come away with me, and come instantly, for the love of God. I'll carry you to

happiness, my dear." He put an arm about her.

"How can I leave my mistress, imbecile?" retorted the waiting-woman.

"Persuade her to come also. Behold Master d'Orchimont!" answered Thibault, impudently.

"Madam, I beg you to believe that I am your faithful servant," said d'Orchimont. His mouth was parched and his limbs trembled.

There was a moment's silence. A faint sound came from within the Castle above.

"To go travelling afoot with a mendicant friar! Fie!" muttered Maria Desirotte, with so acrid an accent of contempt that d'Orchimont could have wrung her neck.

"Faith," said Thibault, "it comes to this, ladies—will you have these two gentlemen fresh and alive, or parboiled? It may have escaped your notice; but the good priest here is about carbonadoing the pair of us before he goes to bed; and, by God's wounds, here he cometh!" he added, as a noise of approaching footfalls became audible.

"Go, sirs," whispered the Countess. "Maria, come with me." D'Orchimont snatched her hand in the darkness and put it to his lips. The Countess ran towards the steps leading into the interior of the Castle: a gleam of torchlight flickered into the chamber: and d'Orchimont

caught the flash of steel in Jacqueline's hand, as Thibault, gripping his arm, ran with him into the subterranean passage.

"We save ourselves," muttered Thibault. "The women are safe enough, curse them." As he spoke, a woman's scream rang out, and they stopped.

"Come back," said d'Orchimont, turning at once; but Thibault laid hold of him.

"Stay," he said. "It may be a woman's ruse. Hearken!"

A babble of voices came echoing down the tunnel. The listeners distinguished the Chaplain's heavy tones amid the treble expostulations of the women.

"The guests of the Count de la Roche must then carry a poniard to walk about his Castle, it appears, Chaplain! I will not be insulted by your servants! Go back, if you please, and let us pass!"

"Return to the casemate, if you please, madam; my errand is urgent."

"There is no room for one to pass another in that passage," whispered Thibault. "They gain us time—they are courageous, those two. Come, d'Orchimont."

There was another scream, and the voice of Maria Desirotte rose in a high, sobbing tirade; and a sudden trampling of feet in the vault an-

nounced that the soldiers in the guard-room were alarmed.

The two adventurers turned and began to run uncertainly in the darkness, touching the slimy rock to right and left, plashing through pools of water, now stumbling, and now falling. The passage appeared interminable, and a horrible fear of toppling headlong into some deep place clogged their feet; when at length they rounded a corner, and perceived, at the end of the black tube, a quiet star shining amid a tangle of branches. At the same moment an enormous explosion rolled about their ears, and a bullet spattered on the stones. The fugitives dashed towards the opening, and bursting through brushwood, emerged upon a wooded hill-side. Telling d'Orchimont to hold by his frock, lest they should be separated, Thibault turned to the right, up the slope, feeling his way from tree to tree in the darkness. A few minutes of breathless stumbling brought them to the summit. Thibault paused to listen, but there was no sound save the rushing of the west wind through the branches.

"The Spaniards will doubtless pursue their march to Liége in the morning down the Ourthe valley," observed Thibault. "Shall we follow the same direction, lie in wait for their passing by, and after act according as events fall out?"

D'Orchimont assented, and Thibault, looking

up at the stars, set his face towards the north-west.

"Will they not pursue us?" asked d'Orchimont, as they went forward down the hill.

"I can scarce think so," replied the Beggar. "The Count would never rouse his men-at-arms to so pitiful an errand. The pious Chaplain is fairly baulked, he and his devil-faced tortioner."

They made what speed they might for near upon three hours: now buffeting their way through a black piece of wood, now crossing a dim, stony table-land in the starshine; when huge bulks of cloud began to pile themselves into the sky from the west, totally blotting out the stars, so that all means of reckoning their course, save by the direction of the wind, were lost. The travellers groped in the windy darkness for some hole or shelving bank where they might pass the night; but they were out upon an arid heath, where was scarcely shelter for a hare. A thick rain had begun to fall, and their case appeared somewhat desperate, when a shift of wind tumbled the stormy wrack together, and the steep roofs and spire of a little church standing on a hill were outlined upon a lagoon of sky sown with stars. The two made towards it: presently the ground fell away under their feet; and they came upon a rugged road, which led upwards until the church loomed behind a huge tree which

was planted a few paces from the porch. On either side a row of cottages was dimly discernible.

"Let us take sanctuary," said Thibault, "until the dawning, when we may see where best to obtain fire and victuals."

Passing beneath the tree, something damp and solid, which was no part of the tree, brushed d'Orchimont's cheek, so that a shudder ran through him.

The church door was unlocked, and, entering, d'Orchimont breathed once more the familiar odour of stale incense. Taking a stone flask of Schiedam from his wallet, Thibault drank from it and passed it to his companion; and, wet and weary, the two lay down upon the wooden benches and speedily fell asleep.

The day had come when d'Orchimont awoke; he was cold and sick, his bones ached, and the strong spirit he had drunk had confused his brain. Sitting up, he gazed stupidly about the little, dreary church, with its painted images of plaster and tawdry offerings, and presently went to the door and opened it. A blustering wind blew the rain in his eyes; blinking, he perceived the body of a man suspended from a branch of the great oak, his head on his chest and his toes pointing to earth, swaying slightly to and fro across a prospect of wild country that gleamed

in the pallid dawning like the track of a snail. With a strong trepidation, d'Orchimont drew back and closed the door. The noise aroused Thibault, who sat up, with a yawn.

"What's the matter, Brother?" he enquired, stretching himself. "Art ill, boy? Your face is white as milk."

"There is a dead man outside," said d'Orchimont, whose limbs trembled in spite of all he could do. "There is a man hanged in the tree."

"O," said Thibault, "is that all? The spectacle will cease to trouble you before all's done. 'Tis a kind of fruit that has become as common as blackberries. *Mordieu*, but I am hungry! Let us go seek the parson, and beg a breakfast of his reverence."

The priest dwelt in a cottage no less ruinous, dirty, and mean than the homes of his people; with a smoking heap of manure before his door, and a filthy cow-shed opening out of the room where the two adventurers found him cheerlessly breakfasting on black bread and sour wine. The pastor was a grizzled, stout peasant-priest, dull as a sheep. He received his visitors with no indication of surprise or curiosity,

"Eat and drink if you will," said the priest, pointing to his meagre fare. "I would I could entertain you better, my brothers; but what you see is all I have. You will excuse me; we are

not very rich in Wa-Ha. There is a good inn at Marche, half a league further on, L'Auberge de la Cloche. You will understand me. The good God knows it is not that I grudge you victuals."

Thibault made a courteous rejoinder, and interrogated the other upon the corpse hanging in the oak-tree. The priest shrugged his shoulders. What did he know? The man was an heretic, without doubt; had owned a small farm, and was accounted a man of substance in Wa-Ha. One of the retainers of Peter Titelmann the Inquisitor had ridden into the village the other day; and lo! when he had gone, there was an heretic a-swing in the oak. The tree was very old, added the priest; of an age quite extraordinary.

Taking their leave of this phlegmatic clergyman, the travellers set forth in the rain, across an open expanse of undulating country, towards a congeries of shining roofs clustered about a bulbous steeple, where the little town of Marche lay in the shallow and wide valley. At the Auberge de la Cloche, a new building of stone, with a bell hanging beneath a little, ornamented pent-house in the peak of the gable, they dried their clothes, washed, and regaled themselves. Starting once more about noon, they directed their course north-eastward: and after walking some four miles across a broken country of pas-

ture, tilled fields, and pine woods, with here and there a wooden cross bearing a tiny metal figure nailed upon it, they came out upon the high ground which falls to the valley of the Ourthe; and beheld, through the shimmer of the rain, the leagues of river winding into mist.

"That is a ford below," said Thibault. "The Blackbeards must pass this way; we have nought to do but to await their coming."

D'Orchimont, with the perilous events of the night before hot in his mind, and with the carrion upon the oak at Wa-Ha still quavering before his eyes, marvelled at his companion's indifferent demeanour. He could not but think it highly probable that the Spanish captain, as an ally of the Inquisition, would consider it his duty to place the vagabond monks under arrest. But since Thibault did not appear to consider these emergencies, d'Orchimont held his peace, girding his loins to the occasion. For a long while the two sat upon the borders of a murmuring wood of pines, keeping watch; until at length the gleaming morions of a party of horse some fifty strong filed out of the haze beneath them. The masqueraders instantly descended the hill to the brink of the ford, where a turn of the valley hid them from the advancing Spaniards. Thibault seated himself upon a flat boulder, took out a large rosary, and, assuming an attitude of devo-

tion, began muttering to himself. Like a rat with a bandaged head, which has stolen a string of beads, thought d'Orchimont, a good deal put out of countenance by this proceeding, as he stood awkwardly beside the impostor, looking up the valley.

The ranks of men-at-arms rode creaking past, their accoutrements gleaming and their horsemen's cloaks glistening in the wet, and splashed into the river. Some took no notice of the friars: others saluted them with the customary demand for the priestly benediction, to which d'Orchimont must return a *Benedicite;* for Thibault never raised his head, but continued his orisons as though he were sitting in church. At the tail of the troop rode the Spanish leader, and by his side rode Jacqueline de Mirlamont with Maria Desirotte. The Spaniard and his charge were conversing and laughing together, and as they drew nearer the girl's grey eyes looked full into d'Orchimont's face, glancing away without a change of expression; and d'Orchimont was filled with bitterness.

"Lo! my friends the wandering friars! Give you good-day. Your blessing, my Fathers. Do you design to sanctify the way for us with your company on the road? I feared this morning, when I found you had gone already, that you had thought me unworthy to yield you such pro-

tection as I might against the perils of travel," said the Spanish captain, drawing rein abreast of the monks.

Thibault started as if he had been awakened from a trance. "Señor," he exclaimed, rising, "is it you? *Benedicite.* We could not tarry your departure this morning, for we had a little errand to despatch with the pastor of Marche yonder, which is out of your road. So rising betimes, we fetched a compass, and, Saint Anthony be praised, he has brought us to meet."

The Spaniard's swarthy, high-featured countenance regarded the speaker from under his visor with a grave attention.

"I look upon the circumstance as a favour granted by Saint Anthony to myself," he said, and, with a courteous gesture, he rode forward into the shallow water, followed by the Countess. Behind her mistress, Maria Desirotte turned and kissed her fingers to Thibault. The two men trussed their monks' frocks to the knee, waded the ford, and fell into the rear of the troop.

All that afternoon, glimmering through the rain some thirty paces in front of him, d'Orchimont beheld the Countess and the Spanish captain riding together with every appearance of friendship; and the Master-Beggar delivered himself to the gloomiest reflections. Towards evening,

they came in sight of the Castle of Durbuy, which is built upon a rock in the midst of a valley of meadows: the river curves about the fortress; and beyond, the hills enclose it with a steep escarpment.

"So this is madam the Countess's inheritance that Alva so lusts after," said Thibault. "Between the Duke, and the Duke's kinsfolk, and the Bishop of Liége, and the Beggars, I fear me Mistress Jacqueline will get but small profit thereof."

The outcast adventurer at his side looked at the formidable buildings commanding the wide and rich demesnes. Every rood of earth and every squared stone conspired against him to set the monk Hilarion, tramping through the mire and darkness, out of sight of Jacqueline de Mirlamont, Countess of Durbuy.

Messengers had been despatched in advance, and the Castle, which was garrisoned by a handful of the Bishop of Liége's retainers, had been prepared for the reception of the troop. Thibault and d'Orchimont sat down to supper with the men-at-arms. Neither the Spanish captain nor the two women were present; and d'Orchimont, picturing to himself the Countess and the Spaniard at supper together, poisoned his victuals with black misgivings.

The Castellan had allotted to the pair of friars

a chamber in a turret overlooking the river, whither they repaired as soon as the meal was ended. Thibault was gaily talkative, according to his custom; but d'Orchimont, immersed in uncomfortable meditations, paid him scant attention. He compared Jacqueline's friendly attitude towards the Spaniard with the icy demeanour he would have liked to observe in her: he thought of them lodging under the same roof that night, and raged; and looking upon his own pitiful and mean condition, he could have wept.

"Thibault," said d'Orchimont, interrupting that personage midway in a sentence, "why are we here?"

"*Dame!*" responded Thibault; "for me, I am here because it amuses me. I know no better reason. As for yourself, yourself must ask yourself."

"'Tis what I have done," said d'Orchimont. "It appears to me that we are totally helpless. The Spaniard may play false, may betray his trust, and what can we do?"

"What, indeed," replied the Beggar, carelessly. "My dear child," he went on, with a slight change of tone, "you are too serious. 'Tis all a game of chance. Why distress yourself? Who knows what opportunities the hour may bring forth? And, at any rate, we are in good quarters for once: a bed is vastly better

than a church bench. Sleep well, comrade, that is my counsel."

But d'Orchimont lay long awake, for his fate was heavy upon him: until the remembrance stole into his mind that he, Philip d'Orchimont, rested within the same walls as Jacqueline de Mirlamont: within her own Castle: where, perhaps, she had spent her childhood: and upon this grain of consolation he fell asleep.

D'Orchimont awoke the next morning with the cloud of distrust, jealousy, and dejection quite gone from his spirit, to a sweet sense as of some new, half-perilous happiness befallen him. Recollection slowly unrolling itself in his mind, the involved complexion of affairs came clearly before him, and his courage leaped up to greet unknown emergencies. Rising, he thrust his head out of the narrow window. The shadow of the Castle fell broad upon the river that rippled immediately beneath, and upon the lawns and alleys of the garden beyond: to the left, the jewelled meadows and the hill-sides sparkled in the sunshine; and to the right, an ancient stone bridge, leading to the garden, arched athwart the bubbling water, bearing an iron crucifix in the centre of its worn parapet.* In the fields

* Not so long ago, the writer, looking on that delightful prospect, beheld in a vision what follows in the tale.

and the garden and the bridge, lying so still and deserted, d'Orchimont beheld the childish playground of Jacqueline de Mirlamont: and imaged to himself a little figure waist-deep in the meadows, gathering flowers; wreathing them, on the way home across the bridge, about the iron cross: playing busily in the great garden, with childish fantasies more real than the tulips and the grass and the trees; bathing, in the summer noons, in the silky water sown with foam spots above the glittering weir, her bright hair floating and mingling with the dazzling reflection of the sunlight.

In the glow of sentiment proper to his condition, d'Orchimont, gazing from his window, pleased himself mightily with these dreams; when, of a sudden, his vision turned to reality, and he perceived Jacqueline crossing the bridge. Pausing for a moment in front of the crucifix, she crossed herself, made obeisance, and passed on into the garden. D'Orchimont flung his monk's frock about him, quitted the room, and found his way down to the sunny courtyard, whence a vaulted passage led to the bridge.

The troopers and stablemen astir in the courtyard, cleaning accoutrements and gossiping, saluted the friar as he passed; and the next moment d'Orchimont was leaning on the parapet of the bridge, gazing furtively at the Countess, who was pacing slowly to and fro in the garden

beyond. Presently she saw the friar, standing apparently absorbed in meditation beside the symbol of his faith, and came towards him. D'Orchimont stood upright as the lady set foot upon the bridge. Her face, thought the ex-monk, was as the face of an angel. He gazed at the bright hair and bright grey eyes with a manifest adoration. Recalling his dark thoughts of the night before, he was appalled at the depths of his own depravity. Jacqueline met his glance, and a subtle shadow passed upon her face.

"Sir," said the girl, "why do you thus persist in running into needless dangers? Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova suspects you both; he knows you to be masquerading."

"Madam," said d'Orchimont, with a readiness that surprised himself, "how could I do less than seek an opportunity to thank you for your courageous kindness in the Castle of La Roche? But for you, madam," he added, "certainly I should not be here, and so you would have your wish."

"That is not kindly said," she returned.

"Forgive me," said d'Orchimont, flushing; "I am unused to converse with ladies. Believe me, I will do as you wish. I will not trouble you."

"Why, then, keep out of needless perils," she said, looking at him frankly. "For me, I am secure from harms."

"Madam, I have sure knowledge that the Spaniard intends delivering you up to the Duke

of Alva at Brussels," said d'Orchimont, his face painted with so lively an emotion that the girl took alarm.

"I cannot believe it," she said. "Who told you so?"

"The Wild-Cat, who hath vowed to wrest you from Alva's clutches and to restore you to the Bishop."

Jacqueline de Mirlamont cast her hands abroad and let them drop. "Alas!" she said. "Such a coil as I am in; poor me, who ask nothing but quiet. They might take mine estates and welcome, so they let me go free."

D'Orchimont, filled with an immense pity, regarded her in silence. At this moment a footfall rang on the stones; and, turning, d'Orchimont perceived the Spanish captain approaching from the castle, his long shadow gliding directly in front of him. Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova, no longer cased in steel, was attired in fine embroidered doublet and satin hose, wearing his long rapier in a silken baldric. He removed his plumed hat with a sweeping obeisance, and greeted the Countess with elaborate courtesy.

"Give you good-day, sir monk," he said, turning to d'Orchimont. "You are about betimes. I trust you rested well?"

"Excellently well, I thank you, Señor," returned d'Orchimont, not without embarrassment,

for he thought he detected a tincture of irony in the Spaniard's manner.

"If you have not already concluded your morning orisons, my Father," went on the Spaniard, "will you do me the kindness to remember my spiritual welfare in making your petitions?"

"I will, Señor," returned d'Orchimont, staring angrily at the other's solemn countenance.

"That is well," said Don Miguel. "Prayers for the monk and adventures for the soldier—I have always admired this happy disposition. The monk orders the soldier's affairs in heaven, while the soldier secures the monk's welfare on earth. Were the same gentleman to meddle in both worlds, how difficult the enterprise, how fraught with divers perils! Do you not think so, madam?" asked Don Miguel, looking full at the Countess.

"Assuredly, Señor," she returned, indifferently.

As the Countess spoke, there fell another footfall, light and quick; and the three, turning towards the Castle, beheld Thibault so close upon them that his shadow, gliding in front of him, touched the feet of the Spaniard at the same moment.

The Beggar's hood had fallen back, and the sun glistened upon his close-cropped head, de-

nuded of its bandage, lighting into ugly prominence a half-healed wound upon his forehead.

Thibault bowed to the Countess like a courtier, and addressed himself to the Spanish captain.

"Señor, I have the honour to present to you my cartel. I challenge you to a duello, here and now."

The Spaniard looked at him for a moment.

"Get you back to breakfast, mad impostor," he said.

"You mistake me, Don Miguel @o⁰ranza de Córdova," returned the Master-Beggar. "I am Thibault de Noirfontaine, whom you or one of your soldadoes—'tis all one—knocked upon the head the other night in the little affair by the water of Lesse. Look upon your handiwork, Señor, and ask yourself, can you deny suitable reparation to a gentleman of Flanders?"

Surveying his challenger, the Spaniard's dark face lighted, and his white teeth showed in his beard. Thibault swiftly divested himself of his monk's frock, and appeared in the Beggars' grey tunic, with the cullisen of the fool's cap embroidered in silver on his sleeve, and a Spanish rapier in his hand. Drawing the blade, he tossed the scabbard on the ground, and drew a dagger from his belt with his left hand.

"Señor, on guard, if you please."

The Spaniard turned to Jacqueline, who was

standing beneath the crucifix, grasping the iron shaft with one hand. Fear, and a strong curiosity wrestled together in her countenance, and she breathed a little quickly.

"Madam," said Don Miguel, "since this gentleman is so discourteous as to force a quarrel upon me in your presence, and since I cannot rid myself of his importunity save either by calling the guard or by a little passage of arms, will you tell me which I shall do?"

But Jacqueline, with that conflict of emotion in her face starting into stronger evidence, could find no words in answer. D'Orchimont, wholly confounded by the turn of events, looked on in eager amazement.

"Come, Señor," struck in Thibault, impatiently, "time wastes. We shall never get such another opportunity. Your courtesy is too admirable; but superfluous, is it not so? Had I not been assured you would never whistle your men-at-arms to your rescue, I should never have given myself the trouble to rise so betimes, *mort de Dieu*, no."

Without a word the Spaniard drew rapier and dagger, and the blades flashed in the sunshine as the two saluted. Perceiving his antagonist to have the sun directly in his eyes, Thibault shifted his ground, so that they should fight diagonally across the bridge.

"Señor," said Thibault, as the blades clashed, and described tiny, shining circles, "I think I perceive in you a very worthy protagonist"—the Spaniard, thrusting straight at his throat, the Beggar parried like lightning with his dagger—"an excellent *passada*, Señor! Aha! I had nearly pinked you upon the *riposte;* 'tis only right, Señor, that you should know that since I wore beard I could never meet my match at sword-play."

The lean, muscular Spaniard parried and thrust, lunged and retreated, steady and silent: the blades rang with a continuous tintinnabulation; and Jacqueline, gazing with parted lips, unconscious of what she did, took hold of d'Orchimont's wrist and grasped it firmly. The young man, glancing quickly round, beheld her face glowing with excitement.

"Take breath, Señor; pause awhile. 'Tis a pity to tire ourselves over-soon," said Thibault.

The gladiators dropped their points, and stood for a minute, breathing deeply.

"Your pardon, sir; your forehead is bleeding," said Don Miguel, politely.

"I thank you, Señor. Do not be concerned on that account, I beg of you; it cools the head," returned Thibault, wiping his injured brow. "Are you ready, Señor?"

Once more the two saluted, and once more the swords rang and sparkled.

"Truly, Señor, you have a most admirable parade," began Thibault once more, speaking in gasps, between *stoccada* and parry; "I would that Signor Giacomo de Grassi, my master-at-arms—do you know him, Señor?—were present. Ah, this it is to live," said the Beggar, catching a thrust full on the cup-guard of his weapon. "*Voilà un raccroc!* Kill me not, Señor; you shall never meet such another fighter in this world."

He fell silent, his eyes sparkled like jewels, and he began to press the Spaniard hard. Again and again Don Miguel must leap back: and, in spite of the most arduous efforts to regain his ground, moment by moment the Beggar pressed him nearer the parapet; till the Spaniard felt his spur grate upon the stone.

"Now, Señor," cried Thibault, in a high, cracked voice, like a man out of himself; and, lunging to his utmost reach, he thrust at the Spaniard's throat. Don Miguel felt the edge graze his neck like the touch of a red-hot wire, and, at the same moment, catching his adversary's blade in the hilt of his dagger, he snapped it in twain. The blade clinked on the stones; Thibault recovered instantly, stood upright, and saluted with the truncheon.

"A pretty *imbroccata*, Señor," said he.

Darkly flushed and panting heavily, Don Miguel dropped the point of his sword and leaned upon the parapet, the blood soaking into his ruff. Jacqueline cried out and put her hands before her face, but only for a moment.

"Are you much hurt, Señor?" she asked. Her face was pale, but she had possession of herself. Going up to the Spaniard, she touched his shoulder with her fingers.

"Let me bind it up, Señor."

Don Miguel put her gently away, and stood erect, with a smile.

"Gentlemen," he said, "if you are perfectly satisfied, I think nothing remains for us but to part in friendship."

"Señor," returned Thibault, "permit me first to restore to you the half of this excellent Toledo, which I had the presumption to borrow this morning. No one regrets its condition more than I do. Señor, may we meet again, and soon." He put on his gown and drew the hood over his face. "*Benedicite*, Countess. Dom Hilarion, are you ready?"

Bareheaded, his left hand reposing on the hilt of his sheathed sword, the red stain slowly widening in his ruff, the Spaniard stood with the air of a host dismissing his guests.

"I pray you keep the sword, sir," said he, "in

memory of a notable combat. *Messieurs les Gueux, adieu.*"

"*Adieu*, M. d'Orchimont," said Jacqueline. The constraint was gone from her voice, and she spoke like a friend. D'Orchimont returned her look with a very eloquent countenance.

"*Adieu*, madam. Señor, *adieu*," he said, and found himself walking with Thibault through the Castle, across the courtyard, and out into the valley.

As they climbed the hill-side, the Castle bell began to ring.

"Hearken to the knell of a lost endeavour," said Thibault. "Had I but pinked the Don, we could 'a' carried off the wenches. There are those Spanish hogs going in to breakfast, and here are we, famishing. The fortune of war! Had we but the women, I could have borne it."

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THEY LEVIED BLACK-MAIL UPON THE BISHOP OF LIÉGE.

"This is a singular tale you bring me, Count," said the Bishop of Liége. "A dreadful story."

"My Lord will readily believe that to be the bearer of such tidings is no very grateful task," said Count Robert de la Marck. He leaned back in his chair, clasped his hands upon his round doublet, and fixed his small eyes on his feudal lord; who, sitting opposite to the Boar, directed a frowning gaze on the table between them.

For a few moments there was no sound save the muttering of the wood-fire. The spring sunshine, streaming through the traceried windows, touched into vivid colour the sylvan hunting scene in the tapestry, the ranks of great books, the cabinets of carved wood and of ivory; and revealed, in a luminous shadow, the golden and bejewelled crucifix hanging in a corner above a fald-stool decked with embroidered drapery.

Rising to his feet, the Bishop stood looking down upon the Count de la Marck. His Lordship was a hale, rosy old man of a noble presence, with a bald crown and white locks falling

to his shoulders, curving nose and chin, and an imperious eye.

"You bring me a singular story, Count," the Bishop repeated, with an expression of wrathful perplexity, grasping his chin in his hand. "Do I understand you aright?—that these Wild Beggars of whom you speak pillaged the Priory in the *Laite*, under the very walls of your Castle, and that when the monks gave you the alarm, and you thereupon made an outfall with a company of men-at-arms, the robbers had already dispersed and got beyond pursuit, carrying with them my niece—she having been entertained at supper by the Prior Smaragdus, together with the Countess de la Marck?" said the Bishop, speaking with a sombre composure, with the air of a man enforcing a strong constraint upon himself.

"You have apprehended the facts perfectly, my Lord," said Count Robert.

"Madam the Countess, your wife, was so fortunate, then, as to make her escape from these ravishers?"

"Yes, indeed, my Lord, I thank Heaven. The one was taken and the other left," answered the Boar, piously.

"I am glad, at least, to learn that the Countess was saved from so terrible a fate," said the Bishop, sternly.

"I thank you, my Lord. But what is it you fear? These roving gentlemen, the Beggars, will hold madam the Countess, your niece, in all honour, doubt it not. They want her ransom, not herself; they want monies wherewith to fight the Spaniard; that is the whole of the matter."

"Why, then, did they suffer the Countess de la Marck to go free? Can you put forward any reason, Count?"

"My brother the Baron of Lumain is art and part with the Beggars—did you not know it, my Lord? There is reason sufficient; but besides"—the Count bared his teeth with an ugly curl of the lip—"in the matter of ransom, the two cases do not stand, perhaps, upon an absolute parity of reasoning, my Lord."

The Bishop eyed the other's bestial visage very darkly for a moment.

"Sir Count," said he, still with that air of strong repression, "I place Mistress Jacqueline de Mirlamont in your keeping, in the stoutest castle in all the Netherlands, and scarce a sennight is spent before you come to tell me she has been stolen away by the Beggars of the Woods."

"Do you charge the fault upon me, my Lord?" cried Count Robert, with a formidable gesticulation.

"Listen to me, sir," said the Bishop, lifting a hand. "I call you to account. If you shall bring my niece to me safe and sound—well. . . ."

The Count understood perfectly the implied threat; but he knew that the Bishop could bring no force into the field sufficient to dislodge his Castellan from the Castle of Bouillon, and knew also that the Bishop was conscious of his impotence. But defiance was no part of De la Marck's design.

"My Lord," he said, with an air of dogged submission, "for what other purpose am I here? I came but to place my vassal sword at your service."

"Then get to horse, Count, and take the road. We waste time—we waste time!" said the Bishop, some pent emotion escaping into his voice and manner.

Count Robert got to his feet.

"I have thirty lances at my back, my Lord," said he. "But with all the will in the world, I cannot, without monies, lead them a-warfaring. Between Spaniard and Master-Beggar, we poor nobles of the laity are picked to the bone nowadays."

"Ah!" said the Bishop, with his eyes upon the floor. "What sum do you reckon sufficient, Count?" he asked, after a short pause, looking up.

"Two hundred and fifty French crowns, my Lord," replied the Boar, shortly.

Reflecting gloomily that, if the Castellan saw fit to retreat incontinently into Bouillon Castle with the gold in his saddle-bags (which, indeed, was precisely Count Robert's intention), his feudal lord would remain entirely helpless, the Bishop resorted to a last expedient, although, as he spoke, he knew it to be futile.

"Count," said the Bishop, "I grudge not money, nor do I seek to disparage your zeal in my service. But let me remind you that I have but to despatch a messenger to the Duke of Alva to bring a *vandera* of mercenaries instantly to my aid."

"My Lord Bishop will do as his wisdom counsels," returned De la Marck, shrugging his shoulders. "Let me tell you, my Lord," the Boar went on, truculently, "that I care not a groat whether or no I go about this employment; not I. But I have heard said that his grace the Governor-General hath—in the cause of his master, the noble Prince Philip of Spain—a tenacious habit of keeping whatsoever he may lay hands on."

He turned to the window and waited. There was no more to be said, for the prize he had set out to gain was about to fall into his hands. The polite mask dropped for a moment from the

churchman's countenance as he glanced malignly at the burly figure with the round, bristling head and protruding jaw, darkly outlined upon the sparkling prospect of landscape.

The Bishop bitterly distrusted his Castellan: he suspected him of complicity in the Beggars' outrageous stratagems; he believed the Boar, in the pursuit of extortion, to be capable of all. And yet, as matters stood, the prelate found himself enclosed in a net by this wily robber of the marches; who, by a singular complication of circumstances, had years ago become the Castellan of the Bishop's Castle of Bouillon. The Bishop himself could despatch no force in pursuit of the Beggars: his retinue was insufficient: while to bring down the Spanish levies was impossible, for those cogent reasons which had not passed unremarked by De la Marck's acute intelligence; so that the Bishop, who would have bought his niece's safety at the price of all his possessions, at the cost of the most arduous sacrifice, must build his dearest hopes upon the unsure fidelity of the Boar of the Ardennes; in whom the prelate's only tincture of confidence arose from his suspicion of the Castellan's venal relations with the Wild Beggars.

So the Bishop sat down at the table, took a slip of vellum, and wrote two lines, signed them, and, rising, handed the billet to Count Robert.

"If you will have the goodness to hand that to Dom Marténe, my secretary, he will give you what you require," said the Bishop.

"My Lord," said Count Robert, with a stiff inclination of his thick body, "you are too generous. Rest assured, your behest shall be speedily and surely accomplished. Intercede for us, meanwhile, I pray you. Give you good-day, my Lord." He moved towards the door. "By the way, my Lord Bishop," added De la Marck, with his hand on the latch, "I cannot disguise from myself that you think somewhat hardly of my wardship since this sudden wild foray of the Master-Beggars. But it comes into my mind, as a parallel instance, that it is scarce an hundred years since this very palace of yours, my Lord, was sacked one night; although the Bishop, your noble predecessor, Louis de Bourbon, had the whole strength of the Duchy of Burgundy at his back."

"Aye," said the Bishop, with his former civil composure. "And this exploit was performed by a renowned ancestor of your own, Count, if I remember aright, the ancestral Wild Boar."

"So singular are the revolutions of fortune, my Lord," returned the Count, with a grin.

"And so inevitable are God's judgments, that the Boar's head was stricken from his shoulders thereafter—was it not so?—and by a Scotch

soldier of fortune, one M. Quentin Durward by name," observed the Bishop, suavely.

"Pardon me, I think you have been misinformed, my Lord," returned the Count. "The red Scotchmen intermeddle in every affair all over the world, I know that; but of this particular crime, I believe that insolent nation to be guiltless. The divine vengeance slept for three full years after the event, when no less a fate befell the Wild Boar than to be ensnared and unjustly beheaded by the Emperor Maximilian. Once more, good-day to you, my Lord."

The door closed behind the odious Castellan; and a change, like the touch of a herald from the host of death's forerunners, passed upon the Bishop. His upright carriage relaxed; his face became wan and suddenly old. Seating himself heavily in his great chair, he leaned his head upon his hand.

But the prelate had scant leisure to brood upon his tribulations: a press of urgent affairs awaited their discharge, which must be gone upon with an undivided attention. It was not until after many hours of irksome toil that the prelate dismissed Dom Marténe, his secretary; and getting wearily out of his chair, went to the window, opened the casement, and leaned upon the sill.

The pale landscape, delicate and alluring as a child's dream, lay sleeping in the clear stillness of the spring evening; and behind a serried line

of firs upon the distant hills the sun declined lower and lower in a halo of radiance. The Bishop, revolving troubled thoughts, stared absently at the dying fires until the last ray vanished beneath the horizon's purple rim. When the veil of coloured dots before his eyes had melted away, he perceived the dark figures of three monks approaching up the winding road that led to the palace from the open country lying to the north-west of Liége city.*

A few minutes later a servitor knocked at the door and informed the Bishop that three friars from the Monastery of Saint Hubert prayed instant speech of his Lordship.

"Bring them in," said the Bishop, wearily, with a passing wonder that the monks should have gone so far out of their way as to arrive by the northern road.

Three Benedictine friars entered the room, and the servitor having closed the door behind him, two of them remained standing by the door, while the third advanced towards the Bishop; who remarked with astonishment that none of the strangers did him reverence.

"Give you good-even, my Lord Bishop," said the foremost monk, throwing back his hood and disclosing a most unpriestly cast of countenance,

* More than three hundred years later to be battered by German cannon.

with long yellow moustaches and a mane of yellow hair.

"Who are you?" asked the Bishop, not without a pang of dismay.

"My Lord," said the stranger, "when you shall have learned the reasons which led me to seek the honour of a conversation with your Lordship, I am persuaded you will pardon me for cloking my entrance in a priest's frock."

Confronted with an emergency fraught with unknown perils, the veteran Bishop gathered his forces for the encounter.

"Are you from Saint Hubert's Monastery, sir?"

"From Bouillon last," replied the stranger, with a peculiar emphasis.

"Ah!" said the Bishop. "And these gentlemen——?" he motioned with his hand towards the hooded figures standing by the door.

"These gentlemen," repeated the other, "are in my service. Will you not be seated, my Lord?" he continued. "I have somewhat to say to your Lordship, and I should be loth to weary you more than I must."

The Bishop, a good deal bewildered, and keeping a wary eye upon his visitors, motioned the speaker to the seat occupied by the Count de la Marck some hours previously, and sat down in his own chair.

"First of all, my Lord," began the stranger, leaning his folded arms on the table and looking full at the Bishop, "we come here about nothing but good towards you. I pledge you mine honour that so long as you yourself do not run us into any danger, your Lordship is safe as though you were behind Saint Peter's gate."

One of the sentinels at the door moved towards the fireplace and stood a little behind the Bishop; but the prelate, sitting erect and returning look for look with the stranger, never moved his eyes.

"Sir," said the Bishop, "I am a man of many affairs, and I beg you to despatch your business as briefly as you may."

"My Lord," said the stranger, "will you answer me a question?"

"Ask it," said the Bishop, who, in spite of himself, felt his initial distrust of this man becoming less acute.

"Is madam the Countess of Durbuy with you, my Lord?"

"She is not. And (in return) why do you ask?"

"Because, my Lord, if she be not here, then Mistress Jacqueline de Mirlamont is on her way to the Governor-General's palace of Jauche, in Brussels."

The Bishop's face went white against the increasing darkness.

"How do you know that, sir?"

"This gentleman, my Lord, will tell you."

At a sign from the stranger, the friar beside the chimney and the friar beside the door changed places.

The Bishop turned his chair towards the monk nearest him, so that the firelight flickered upon the prelate's lined countenance, as he listened to d'Orchimont; who related briefly how, lodging two nights agone at the Castle of Durbuy, he had learned by chance from a man-at-arms that the Spanish captain purposed to escort the Countess straightway to Brussels.

There was a good deal left unexplained in this narrative, but the Bishop listened with neither comment nor remark. When d'Orchimont had made an end the Bishop turned again to the first speaker.

"Sir," he said, "I had sure news, no later than this morning, that the Countess had fallen into the hands of the Wild Beggars."

"Nevertheless, the information was already out of date, my Lord."

There was that in his visitor's manner which impelled belief. The Bishop saw the fabric of his schemes lie ruined, and recalled the bags of gold the extortioner had wrung from him that morning.

"I . . . I find myself much in your hands,

sir," said the Bishop. "You behold me in much distress of mind—what you tell me of my niece troubles me out of measure. And when I ask you once more, sir, who you are, I do so, I pledge you my word, with a single eye to my niece's safety—if need be, to her rescue."

"They call me The Wild-Cat, my Lord," said the stranger.

The Bishop sat perfectly immobile while a man might count thirty, staring through the dusk at the renowned outlaw. Then he turned to the monk behind him.

"Will you have the kindness to light these candles?" said he.

D'Orchimont took a piece of blazing stick from the fire and lit with it the tapers in a seven-branched silver candlestick standing at the Bishop's elbow; and with a curious, searching glance at the churchman, drew back to his former position.

"Believe me, my Lord, I am not come to add to your sorrow," said The Wild-Cat, "but, on the contrary, if it be possible, to take it away. I am here to sell my services for a price."

Who next, out of all the world, would appear to prey upon his grief, thought the Bishop, and the blood mantled in his face.

"You, sir?" he cried. "You also? Have you not wrought enough evil upon me?" The

tide of his indignation rising to a flood, the Bishop stopped, with a clutching hand at his collar.

"Hear me, my Lord." The Wild-Cat leaned forward upon his folded arms, emphasizing his words with the points of his fingers on the table. "'Tis unfortunate that destiny has set us in opposition one to another in every affair of life, perhaps—save one. Let us forget the others, my Lord, and discuss the one. You desire the deliverance of madam the Countess from the Spanish power, and I also desire it."

"Why did you steal away my niece, sir? Why could you not leave her in peace? What purpose had you in this outrage?" the Bishop demanded, with much bitterness.

"My Lord, you will understand that his grace the Governor-General and myself are engaged upon a great contest of skill, wherein I cannot let slip the slenderest chance. Fortune set Mistress Jacqueline de Mirlamont in my path; knowing that the Countess had great possessions, I took her for the sake of the ransom, which (why should I deny it?) would have gone instantly towards assailing my dearest enemy, Alva. But we had no luck, you see. For a marauding troop of Blackbeards crept upon us while we slept, and kidnapped our fair hostage. The sequel you have just heard, my Lord."

"And now?" enquired the Bishop.

"And now, my Lord, I ask you to transfer some of the church's gold into the coffers of rebellion, and I will do all that man may to set the balance even. I can say no more than that."

There was a pause. The Bishop was courtier and diplomatist first and ecclesiastic afterwards: his principles were strictly utilitarian: and it was neither a motive of loyalty nor a scruple of rectitude that contended in his mind against the temptation, but the thought of contingent discovery; for were such a transaction as the Master-Beggar expounded ever disclosed to the government, his Lordship's destruction would be total and immediate.

"Your profit, sir, in this bargain is plain to see," said the Bishop. "For mine, I rely upon your promise, it appears."

"It appears so, my Lord," returned the Master-Beggar.

"Sir," said the Bishop, coldly, "I do not think that I am destitute of natural affection: and yet, do you know, a little exercise of self-examination reveals to me that the attribute is limited."

The Wild-Cat inclined his head. "You mistake me quite, my Lord," said he. "You do me wrong, if (to be plain) you think me capable of attempting to profit by so affecting a circumstance. No. 'Tis the gain or loss of a great

estate, my Lord, that hangs in the balance. If the chance of gain, set against the certain loss, be not worth three hundred French crowns, my Lord, let me go as I came."

"Do you know, sir," said the Bishop, "'tis the second time to-day that some such proposition has been submitted to me?"

"Indeed, my Lord! You surprise me. And, if the question be not indiscreet, by whom?"

"By the Count Robert de la Marck," replied the Bishop, with a careful eye on the other's countenance; which, however, expressed an unfeigned astonishment.

"Pardon me once more, my Lord; but did you agree thereto?"

The Bishop shrugged his shoulders, with a nod: and, with that watchful eye on the great, ruddy face opposite to him, saw it change swiftly; and reflected, with some pleasure, that this M. le Chat-Féroce wore a highly dangerous aspect when angered.

The Master-Beggar got suddenly to his feet. "My Lord," said he, "as to this accursed money, say no more. You have paid it already, it seems, and to the wrong person, *mort de Dieu!* Whether less or more, 'tis all one; I care not a groat. The task is mine, my Lord, the task is mine. The maid shall be got, though the Spaniards must first be driven into the sea. My Lord

Bishop, I have the honour to wish you a good-evening;" and, pulling his hood about his brows, The Wild-Cat opened the door and went out, followed by Thibault and, more slowly, by d'Orchimont; so that, by the time the latter had closed the door, his comrades had turned the corner of the corridor and were descending the stairs.

D'Orchimont stood a moment, his hand to his mouth, in a painful irresolution.

No sooner had he beheld the face of the Bishop in the coloured light of sunset that filled the chamber, than d'Orchimont saw in the worn, handsome lineaments the likeness of Jacqueline de Mirlamont: again, in the flickering firelight, the resemblance went and came; and studying his Lordship by the candles' gleam, while he parleyed with the Master-Beggar, d'Orchimont confirmed his impressions.

Like part of herself, this resemblance in one of her own blood drew d'Orchimont irresistibly to him. Moreover, in the fever of his own anxiety, d'Orchimont credited the Bishop, despite the controlled diplomacy of his manner, with the same burning suspense on behalf of his niece (if, indeed, she bore that relationship to her guardian); and he pitied the prelate from his heart.

D'Orchimont, with a faint knock upon the

panel, re-entered the room. The Bishop, still seated at the table, turned towards him with such another look as Jacqueline de Mirlamont had cast upon the ex-monk walking beside her stirrup, upon a morning in the forest.

"What would you, sir?" asked the Bishop, patiently.

But, upon finding himself alone with so great a spiritual lord, d'Orchimont's convent-bred diffidence suddenly overmastered him, and he sought in vain for words. The Bishop observed his visitor attentively for a moment, then rose, and, turning to the fireplace, stood warming his hands, with his back to d'Orchimont.

"You have somewhat to tell me; is it not so?" said the Bishop.

"My Lord," stammered d'Orchimont, gaining a little courage from the prelate's gentle indifference of manner, "I desire to tell you that . . . that of my own will I am bound to your service in this affair. For I have made it the business of my life, my Lord," continued d'Orchimont, with an access of confidence, "to serve madam the Countess of Durbuy."

The Bishop turned round and once more gravely scrutinised his visitor. A boyish ardour of purpose and an absolute sincerity were written upon d'Orchimont's open countenance; and, despite the tincture of the ridiculous in his burst

of impulsive chivalry, the Bishop reflected, perhaps, that, out of the three volunteers who had that day forced themselves upon the unhappy prelate, it was this fresh-faced boy, twittering with shy eagerness in the middle of the floor, who might be turned to some account as an instrument.

"Come to me," said the Bishop, "after compline this evening, and we will talk further of this matter. Come to the privy postern in the western wall, beneath the transept of the chapel, and knock thrice. It would be well—although I lay no charge upon you—to observe secrecy. And now haste you to depart, that this household may be preserved; for, from what hath come to mine ears of the habits of your famous captain, he would incontinently tear down my Castle walls with his hands, did he suspect us of detaining you against your will," concluded the Bishop, wearily.

But d'Orchimont, upon descending to the quadrangle, found The Wild-Cat leaning against the wall with folded arms, while Thibault, surrounded by gaping monks, was relating the story of a miracle.

"So the great King Maximin sought the hand of the blessed Saint Catherine, daughter of King Costis, prince of Egypt, and came daily to woo the Minerva of Christianity. 'I will never wed

on earth,' said she. 'We will see as to that,' said the King, and approached to embrace Saint Catherine. But she dwined and dwindled swiftly before his eyes like an image of foam, and changed into a little red serpent with a woman's face, that swung upon its tail and gibed at King Maximin in a shrill faint voice like an echo. So he cursed her for a witch, and——"

"Come away, Dom Thibault," The Wild-Cat struck in, catching the orator by the arm, as d'Orchimont came up. "The duties of our sacred errand drag us hence; we may tarry no longer."

"The blessing of Mary upon you, dear Brothers," cried Thibault. "When next I come I will finish the tale."

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE BEGGAR WENT TO THE TAVERN OF THE THREE VIRGINS, WHILE THE MONK WENT TO THE CASTLE OF THE BISHOP.

The same evening, the Count de la Marck, who was lodging for the night at the tavern of the Three Virgins, in Liége, sat alone in his room before the fire, drinking sherris-sack and smoking Trinidado. The Boar had gorged himself to the throat; and drowsing in a state of happy stupefaction, he brooded complacently upon the booty he had extorted from the Bishop that morning. Following in the track of the Beggars, in order to reach the neighbourhood of Liége at the same time as The Wild-Cat, De la Marck had passed through a village immediately behind the Spanish troop under Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova: and hearing from the peasants that the Spaniard had been sent by the Governor-General to exterminate the Beggars of the Woods, De la Marck had reckoned that, in all likelihood, disaster would speedily overtake The Wild-Cat; and that their scheme of parting the Countess's ransom would thus be

brought to nothing. Hence Count Robert had resolved to go straightway to the Bishop of Liége with a little design of his own, and so make what profit he might while yet there was time. Now, reflected the Boar, with sober self-gratulation, whatever betide, I have gained two hundred and fifty crowns by a morning's conversation: such are the wages of your born diplomatist; while as for the share of the ransom, that also may yet be mine.

The Count's meditations were broken at this point by the noise of someone entering the room. Turning himself sluggishly in his chair, De la Marck perceived a large man, wearing a cloak and a great black hat, in the act of closing the door. The stranger took off his hat and unfastened his cloak, revealing the formidable visage of The Wild-Cat.

"Give you good-evening, Count," said he. "Espying some of your lacqueys about the doorway, I came in."

De la Marck, albeit a trifle shaken by this sudden apparition, and heavy with wine, bade his visitor welcome, and invited him to drink. But The Wild-Cat drew a chair to the side of the chimney and sat looking into the fire. De la Marck began to find the silence somewhat ominous.

"Well, man, what news, what news? Have

you seen the Bishop, eh?" enquired De la Marck, at length.

"You have not heard, then?"

"*Pardieu!* no. I have heard nothing."

"Is it possible!" said The Wild-Cat. "And yet, indeed, how should you? Well, I bear but evil tidings for you, Count."

"How, then?" De la Marck sat upright and fixed his tiny eyes upon the other.

"The Spaniards came upon us in the night, and lo! in the morning our hostage was gone," said The Wild-Cat, looking full at the Count; who shrugged his shoulders and settled back into his chair, with an execration. He had not known, then, thought the Master-Beggar. So much the worse.

"And what am I to say to my Lord Bishop, let me ask you?" demanded De la Marck, angrily.

"Set your mind at ease, Count. The Bishop is already informed."

"*Sang du Christ!*" exclaimed the Boar, staring. "You have seen the Bishop!"

"Does that surprise you?" retorted The Wild-Cat. "I think, having had his Lordship's ward in my keeping and having the misfortune to lose her, I could scarce do less, Count. You and I were in equal case, save that you have bewrayed a trust, which I have not, and yet you also have

seen the Bishop, it appears," said the Beggar sternly, leaning forward and beating on the palm of his left hand with the fingers of his right.

The Boar's upper lip began to curl and his little eyes shrank to pin-points beneath the wrinkling brows, from which a long bristle projected here and there that moved like the antennæ of an insect. He sat upright, grasping the arms of his chair.

"What talk is this?" said De la Marck, savagely.

"Do not let us waste time, Count Robert," said The Wild-Cat, still with that regular action of the right hand on the left, but with the fist clenched. "I am here to demand the completion of that act of restitution you began this morning; when, having bewrayed your master the Bishop to me for a price, you sought to set the balance even by bewraying me to the Bishop, also for a price, after the manner of M. Judas Iscariot. I do you the justice, Count, to remember that when you demanded these pistoles of my Lord—who, I protest, is a most excellent and noble gentleman—you did so upon condition of rendering him a service which you thought you could perform, not knowing that Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova had forestalled your admirable intentions. Destiny having thus taken

the adventure out of your hands, my dear Count, to a gentleman of your exalted intelligence there can be no doubt as to what should be done with the just reward."

The Wild-Cat paused, keeping a steady glance from beneath his level, overhanging brows upon the inflamed robber of the marches.

"*Par le sang de Dieu!* no, there will be no doubt as to that; *mordieu*, no!" cried De la Marck, with a strangling utterance.

"Precisely," said The Wild-Cat, getting suddenly to his feet. "And nothing now remains, Count, but to hand me the bags of gold."

De la Marck rose also, and the two freebooters stood facing one another. The Count's glance left the face of The Wild-Cat, travelled swiftly round the chamber, noted that his rapier was hanging in its baldric against the opposite wall, out of reach, and came back again. Still frowning, his teeth showed in his beard and he laughed with a sound like the grating of a saw upon iron.

"Does this jest amuse you, M. *le Gueux?*" snarled the Count.

"Truly, it diverts me, Count."

"And I, sir, am so highly entertained, that unless your jest is finished I will crave permission to summon two or three arquebusiers to enjoy it also," said De la Marck, labouring to

retain control upon himself like a man in danger of demoniac possession.

The Wild-Cat stepped swiftly to the door and drew the bolt. In the act of turning again towards the Count, a gleam of light shone in his eyes; at the same moment he started aside, and the Count's dagger struck the panel beside the Beggar's head with a clean, sounding stroke, pierced the wood, and stuck, quivering. With a cry, The Wild-Cat turned upon De la Marck, unsheathing his sword. The Count was stooping forward with the arm which had just launched the poniard outstretched, the open hand extended, his eyes glaring, and his jaws fallen apart. As The Wild-Cat gazed steadily at him, holding his naked sword with dropped point, the Boar's attitude gradually relaxed; his arm fell to his side, and he stood silent, an embodiment of sullen ferocity.

Standing in the broad light of the hanging lamp, the face of The Wild-Cat flushed darkly with anger, and in the blots of shadow beneath his brows his eyes glistened.

"Are you out of your senses, Count? Are you stricken stark lunatic? Were you merely drunk, you had never thrown so straight. Do you know what you have done, Boar of the Woods? Let me tell you, that were you nailed to that door like a weasel, *mordieu!* you would

not be given to death more surely. Hearken, Count. I know you for a pretty fencer: nevertheless, you cannot stand before me; and although luck counts for but little in this pastime, the luck is with me to-night. Moreover, Count, you have been swilling liquor, while I am sober as the tomb. I would have fought you for your booty this evening, but I would have stayed my hand from slaying you for the sake of your brother, the Baron of Lumain, who is a valiant and loyal Beggar. But now . . . I shall certainly kill you, Count. Take your rapier, if you please."

Without a word, De la Marck walked towards the place where hung his sword, and unhooked it. The Wild-Cat wrenched the poniard from the door and presented it by the point to his adversary, and taking his own dagger in his left hand, he fell on guard, and the blades clashed.

De la Marck had that sort of padded agility sometimes observable in fat men of an active habit; but he was shorter by half a head than his adversary, who had, therefore, a longer reach. Moreover, The Wild-Cat, who was one of the most renowned fighters of his time, had, through years of continual practice, so trained his formidable mass of bone and sinew to the use of the sword, that the man and his weapon were welded into one; into a perfect engine of destruction animated by a controlled fury, and

directed by an extraordinary and unerring swiftness of perception.

For several minutes The Wild-Cat did no more than parry the onslaughts of De la Marck; and when the Boar began to draw his breath deeply and the drops of perspiration were gemming his tufted eyebrows and falling thence to the floor with a tiny splash, the Master-Beggar began a steady attack. Once and again the steel, avoiding De la Marck's dagger, slid along the collar of his doublet, or pricked his throat: once and again the point struck upon his breast; and still The Wild-Cat, slaking his thirst for vengeance, played with his adversary's life. De la Marck, with despair griping his heart, sobbing for breath, his beard flecked with foam, still fought in mere desperation; when a great sound arose from the street without, like the tramp of an advancing army.

The Wild-Cat leaped back a step and dropped his point.

"Rest a little, my dear Count," said he. "There is plenty of time."

De la Marck retreated, and leaning against the wall, presented an aspect of shocking exhaustion.

The Wild-Cat, still keeping an eye upon the heaving Boar, went to the window and opened the casement. The clatter of hoofs upon the

stones, the jingle of harness, and a broken noise of talk flowed into the room. Leaning out, the Beggar perceived a troop of mounted cavaliers in steel cap, back and breast, halting at the door of the tavern, and glimmering in the darkness far up the street. The leader, in the light of the lamp at the door, was talking with the innkeeper.

"Hola! De Carloo!" cried The Wild-Cat.

"Hola!" cried the leader of the troop, looking up. "Who calls? Aha, my gallant, is it you? Well met."

"Count," said The Wild-Cat, drawing in his head, "here are the Seigneur de Carloo and some five hundred cavaliers. The interruption is excessively ill-timed. Should they find you here, dying upon the floor of a sword-wound, the explanations that must ensue will be highly tedious. Will you consent to put off our quarrel to a more convenient occasion, Count?"

The Boar muttered a sulky assent.

"But the monies about which we had that little discussion, my dear Count. Render to me the monies, if you please."

De la Marck glowered at the Beggar in silence.

"*Pardieu!* If I have not the gold before I can say a paternoster, Count, I will kill you before you can cross yourself," said The Wild-Cat, very gently.

De la Marck perceived that he was beaten. Sheathing his rapier and his dagger, he took up a cloak which lay across a chair, drew three leathern bags from the pockets, and, with eyes averted, tossed them on the table; whence The Wild-Cat swiftly transferred them to his own pockets. The Beggar sheathed his weapons, swung his cloak about him, put on his hat, and, advancing to the table, filled a goblet of wine.

"*Vive le Roi et les Gueux!*" cried the Master-Beggar, and emptied the cup at a draught. He filled another.

"To our next meeting, Count Robert de la Marck," said he, drinking; and, with a salute, he was gone.

In the meantime, Philip d'Orchimont had been employed about the same affair, albeit in quite another manner. Soon after The Wild-Cat had quitted the camp in the woods to rouse the Boar in his lair, d'Orchimont, still wrapped in his monk's frock, started for the Bishop's Castle. As he emerged from the woods and struck into the high road, the Castle bell began to ring for compline. That iron voice awoke the most dispiriting memories of enforced devotion within the ex-monk; and with an instant reaction, the adventurer drank in the free air of the night, that was laden with a spring odour of trampled dust and budding leaves. The myriad

stars, sparkling in a clear sky, beckoned him to a new country beyond the dim hills: and the glimmering road, curving upwards to the dark fortress, lured him towards unknown, enchanting destinies.

A stone stairway led up the face of the escarpment of rock upon which the Castle chapel was built; ascending, d'Orchimont rounded the apse that towered above him, like the stern of a Spanish galleon, with its tiers of flying buttresses and a little forest of pinnacles, turned the corner of the transept beneath an arch that formed a bridge between the chapel and the main building, and espied the privy postern in the wall on his right hand. D'Orchimont stood still and gazed about him. From within the chapel the deep sound of rhythmic chanting swelled and sank: above him rose the tall window of the transept, its elaborate tracery engraven black upon the robed, dim figures in the glass; in front, beyond the low parapet that fenced the terrace of rock, loomed a vast prospect of night, and stars, and mysterious waste country, and the roofs of the city huddled in the valley, with here and there a dot of light.

To d'Orchimont, who, since the fire kindled within him, at a glance, upon the bridge of the iron crucifix, saw all things by a new and strange illumination, it seemed that he beheld plainly,

in a vision, the poisonous, intriguing, narrow life within the strong walls beneath which he was standing—the life from which, at a blow, he had severed himself: and the outlawed life of warfare, roving wood and wold; and the mechanic, prisoned life of cities. He looked for a moment upon the whole tumultuous world and saw it revolving apart, like a wheel in the desert, and the spectacle left him cold. Let him follow the star of his desires; the rest was but machinery, working blindly against him or upon his part. That scene in Holy Writ, where the Adversary, carrying the Christ into an exceeding high mountain, sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, flitted for a moment before the dreamer's eyes: and with a passing wonder that the divine constancy to an ideal abstraction could be as potent as a lover's devotion, d'Orchimont turned to the door and knocked thrice.

The door was opened by a cowled figure which led d'Orchimont in silence along a dark passage, and opening a door at the end, lifted the arras and motioned to d'Orchimont to enter; the tapestry dropped behind him, and the adventurer found himself once more in the Bishop's chamber.

"Be seated, sir," said the Bishop, who was sitting in a great chair beside the fire. "You

have asked me," he continued, in even, kindly tones, "very directly, to confide a certain trust to you. Before doing so, I think it but fair that you should put your faith in me so far as to tell me plainly who you are and whence you come. I am not requiring your confession; and should you confide your story to me, I shall receive it, not as a tonsured priest, but as a man—let us say—who is old enough to be your grandsire."

In the look he turned upon d'Orchimont, the likeness to Jacqueline de Mirlamont was so visibly manifest, as to lacerate afresh the lover's wound that separation inflicts so surely. No shadow of suspicion crossed d'Orchimont's mind; but had he doubted this venerable old gentleman, he would still have taken the risk without a thought.

"I am greatly honoured, my Lord," said he. "I will tell you all."

The Bishop listened to the ex-monk's story with a manner of grave attention that conveyed a subtle suggestion of kindly sympathy and comprehension; now and again interposing a question or requiring an explanation.

"M. d'Orchimont," said he, when the other had made an end, "I thank you. As I have said, I have not brought you here to apportion praise or blame, to laud or to condemn; but I may say, M. d'Orchimont, that, in my opinion,

you did perfectly right to quit the monachal life. Such a calling is not for all. There are diversities of gifts. . . . Now, as to the matter which brought you to me. You tell me you have bound yourself to a certain service, of your own free will. And were I to set my mandate in opposition to you, I believe I am not mistaken in apprehending that such an act on my part would scarce affect your resolution."

The Bishop paused.

"My Lord, under submission, it would make no difference," said d'Orchimont, with great firmness.

"But," said the Bishop, with emphasis, "but, sir, let there be no misunderstanding between us at the outset. You may pledge yourself to what you will; I pledge myself to nothing. If you look for reward, you must be disappointed. If you cherish the least hope of recompense, banish the expectation. In this service there can be no wages. You understand me, M. d'Orchimont?"

"Perfectly, my Lord," returned d'Orchimont, reddening, and speaking with some difficulty. Something may come of this boy's folly, after all, thought the Bishop, observing him.

There was a short silence.

"Well, M. d'Orchimont?" said the prelate, with a smile.

D'Orchimont got to his feet. "It is perhaps

possible," said he, "that your Lordship has misunderstood me. I fear that my speech is very clumsy."

"Not in the least, sir. On the faith of a gentleman, no," returned the Bishop, regarding the offended youth with the same smiling benevolence of aspect. He drew a massive seal-ring from his finger. "Let this convince you, my son," said the Bishop. "Do me the kindness to take this ring. It may serve you upon occasion as a token; moreover, should any misfortune come upon you (for you are about to run into great danger), and you will send me news thereof, together with this ring, if I can give you succour, I will. And now, my son, farewell. In my prayers be assured that I will not forget you."

D'Orchimont knelt to receive the ring, and, according to the fashion of the time, kissed the priestly hand that gave him the gift.

"But before you go hence you must drink a cup of Burgundy, and eat a little," said this fatherly prelate.

He led the way into an adjoining chamber, where was a table spread with wine and victuals: constrained his guest to eat and drink; and afterwards, taking a candle in his hand, conducted d'Orchimont to the postern door and dismissed him with a blessing.

D'Orchimont descended the hill and took his way towards the woods with the image in his mind of the old man's fine, ruddy face illumined, in the light of the guttering candle, with that haunting resemblance, as he stood for a moment at the open door, with his white, jewelled hand upraised.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW SEÑOR DON FERDINANDO ALVAREZ DE TOLEDO, DUKE OF ALVA AND GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE NETHERLANDS, PROFITED BY AN EASTER SERMON.

Two days later, upon Good Friday (Easter, 1568, falling in the early days of April), The Wild-Cat and his Beggars, together with a troop of near upon six hundred cavaliers under the Seigneur de Carloo and his brother the Seigneur de Risoir, were encamped in the forest of Soignies, at a point some five leagues distant from Brussels. During the twenty leagues of march, d'Orchimont had been singly engrossed in considering his course of action. Save that his company was marching towards Friesland, where Louis of Nassau was gathering recruits, d'Orchimont had no knowledge of his leader's plans; but since the troop was on the road to Brussels, where, for aught he knew, was Jacqueline de Mirlamont, he was so far content. But having arrived in the forest of Soignies, d'Orchimont could see no way to shape his course without seeking the counsel of The Wild-Cat. Accordingly, he went to the Beggar captain;

and, putting a strong constraint upon himself, told him, not without an occasional ellipsis, of his doings in the Bishop's castle.

"But when I set you about esquire's duty to the captive Countess, Master Philip, I meant not at all to lay a task upon you that should last the remainder of your life," said The Wild-Cat. "'Twas in *my* service you were to trail a pike, if you recollect yourself."

Somewhat discomfited, d'Orchimont found nothing to reply.

"But as events fall out," resumed the Beggar, "at this moment (and in these days 'tis never worth while to forecast a future on earth when the lot may be cast in heaven) you may serve the two masters at once—The Wild-Cat and Master Cupidon. There is also, one should remember, the service of God; and behold a most admirable trinity."

The two were pacing up and down at a little distance from the camp, where the men were busied about the fires, which were shooting red tongues into the grey dusk and the shadows that lurked among the trees. Columns of smoke rose against the far, pale sky, and the aromatic odour of burning wood filled the air. The Wild-Cat stopped in his walk and contemplated the scene in silence.

"These gentlemen," said he, at length, with a

wave of his hand, "whom you see enduring hardness with such an excellent zeal, nevertheless intend to dine in the Governor-General's palace of Jauche, in Brussels, upon Easter Sunday. Who knows? And whether they do so or not, Master Philip, depends mainly upon two persons—the Seigneur de Carloo and Dom Hilarion."

"Upon me?" exclaimed d'Orchimont.

"Hearken, my son," continued The Wild-Cat. "Yonder"—he pointed northward across the camp—"lies the Monastery of Gronendael, and within that convent lies the Duke of Alva, who has retired thither from Brussels, to recreate himself, after the monotony of many weeks' continuous signing of the Blood-Council's death-warrants, with the pious exercises proper to this holy season. The ladies and gentlemen of his household have accompanied his grace, and among them is doubtless the Countess of Durbuy. Now, the Seigneur de Carloo, so he tells me, has pledged himself to William of Orange to deliver a message to the Governor-General; and, in compliment to his grace's posture of devotion at this time, De Carloo will put on the guise of a Benedictine friar. This will ensure the further advantage of gaining him a ready admission into the convent. Hand-in-hand with the neophyte, Dom Hilarion will enter the Mon-

astery, instructing the green brother very carefully as to his manner of behaviour, what he shall say and do, and what refrain from. For the rest, you must each pursue your business as best you may. So you will take yet another cast of your old office to-morrow, Master Philip. I have no more to say but to exhort you to make the most of whatever chance befalls. Give you good-night, Master Philip;" and the Beggar, with a salute, left d'Orchimont to digest his orders.

What then, thought d'Orchimont, was the nature of this message, which should have such power upon the adamant Duke of Alva, that, with four-and-twenty thousand soldiers at the ducal back, he should yet allow a handful of rebel cavaliers to occupy the capital upon the very next day?

Deep in the unexplored recesses of his mind the solution to the enigma peered out at him for a moment: but partly from a fine scruple, since the Beggar Captain had not chosen to be more explicit; and partly from a subtle, instinctive dread lest, upon perceiving a certain possibility, his conscience might rebel, d'Orchimont refused to recognise that little spectre. With a swift diversion, he occupied his mind with the single precious reflection that on the morrow he should see Jacqueline de Mirlamont once more, and that

a supreme opportunity, great and vague and shining, awaited the touch of destiny.

Upon the next afternoon (being Easter Eve), the whole troop advanced through the forest and pitched a camp within half a league of the Monastery of Gronendael; and from hence Dom Hilarion and Dom Amalarius (so had d'Orchimont, out of his monkish lore, named De Carloo) set forth on foot towards the convent. De Carloo had a short, dark, broad-shouldered person, an exceedingly deep voice, punctilious manners, and a talent for placid silence. D'Orchimont felt somewhat at a loss beside this portentous conspirator; until Dom Amalarius, requesting him to discourse of conventual usages, set him at ease with gravely polite observations, delivered with a dignity unimpaired by his novel attire.

The Monastery of Gronendael was an old, grey congeries of buildings standing in a walled garden amid sloping pastures. As the friars drew near, the bells broke into a chime of three, ringing for vespers. Hilarion knocked upon the great wooden gate; the Porter opened the wicket, and, seeing a pair of Benedictine friars, requested their blessing.

Dom Amalarius, with all a novice's enthusiasm, blessed the Porter in tones that seemed to reverberate from the ground beneath his feet, and Dom Hilarion requested a night's lodging. The

Porter, according to rule, despatched the Sub-Porter to obtain the Abbot's permission before opening the gate: and while he was gone, the Porter, unable to contain himself, informed the strangers, with a simple, childish importance, that the Duke of Alva was then dwelling within the convent, together with his household: and, in reply to a little questioning on the part of Dom Amalarius, he pointed out the guest-house for the laity, which communicated with the south transept of the chapel by a covered passage; and related how the Duke was most punctilious in his attendance at the daily offices, upon which occasions his grace occupied the bishop's throne in the chancel. The Sub-Porter returning, the guests were admitted, and, at their request, the Porter conducted them straightway to the door of the chapel, where the monks were then assembling for vespers.

Save for the candle burning at the Reader's desk, and the tapers glimmering on the black-draped altar, a brown gloom filled the chapel; and Dom Amalarius, profiting by the obscurity, mingled with the monks and threaded his way, followed closely by Dom Hilarion, to a seat at the crossing of nave with transepts.

A grille of wrought iron, extending across the whole width of the opening, and from the pavement to the springing of the arches, separated

the nave from the south transept, which was thus set apart for the use of the laity among the guests of the convent. A door of iron scroll-work stood open in that corner of the screen nearest the chancel, and a heavy black curtain depended across the opening. Upon this curtain the two monks fixed their attention, for it was through the door in the grille that the Governor-General must pass from the guest-house to the great carved seat in the chancel.

A Sacristan passed into the transept and lit two or three candles in tall iron standards; and the place quickly filled with a company of ladies and gentlemen, all habited in black, who remained standing.

The muffled chime in the tower above had already begun to slacken, when the curtain was lifted, and a hand held it back; a white face with a dark moustache and peaked beard detached itself from the darkness, and a great gentleman dressed in black came slowly forward. D'Orchimont's heart leaped in his body. Did he indeed behold the Duke of Alva?

"Señor Don Christóbal de Zuñiga, the Duke's Provost," whispered De Carloo. The curtain dropped behind an old, stout, white-headed man who followed the Provost into the chancel.

"The Master of the Household," added Dom

Amalarius. "Mass! It appears that the Señor *Duque* is not coming, then."

The bell ceasing, the Reader began to intone the office. As the service went on, d'Orchimont stole furtive glances through the iron screen, searching the crowd of shadowy faces; and presently, with a strong thrill of emotion, he perceived Jacqueline de Mirlamont. But her eyes were cast down and she did not see him. Once and again d'Orchimont tried to meet her glance and failed. At last he touched De Carloo, who was apparently absorbed in devotion, and they changed places, a manœuvre which brought Dom Hilarion next to the iron grille. The slight movement caused Jacqueline to look that way, and for an instant her eyes met d'Orchimont's gaze. Not daring to prolong the moment, he averted his head; nor did he look again.

When the service was over, De Carloo, who was kneeling with his chin sunk upon his breast, plucked d'Orchimont by the sleeve, and the two remained upon their knees until the chapel was empty save for the Sacristan: who, moving softly here and there, extinguished the light upon the Reader's desk and the candles in the transept, and finally quitted the chapel. The spectacle of two monks remaining entranced in private devotion presented nothing unusual to his observation. The dull noise of the door closing behind

the Sacristan was still echoing in the darkness when De Carloo got to his feet; and followed by d'Orchimont, lifted the curtain and entered the transept.

"How long have we before the next mass, M. Hilarion?" asked De Carloo, in tones like the muttering of a bassoon.

D'Orchimont replied that, being Easter Eve, an extra service would doubtless be held between vespers and compline, which, in all likelihood, would be followed by a sermon.

"Good," said De Carloo. "Now, at the end of this mass of which you speak, I shall deliver a message to the Señor *Duque* from one who is even greater than himself. It may be that, having done so, I shall stand in need of a quick and privy passage. I understand that you are acquainted with churches, M. d'Orchimont. Is there any way to escape from this place save by the doors, do you think?"

"There should be a gallery at the level of the clere-story running right round the building, with a staircase leading up thereto within one of these great pillars, and another staircase therefrom leading into the courtyard," answered d'Orchimont. "But how to find it in this darkness?"

"Here is that shall serve us," said De Carloo. A chapel opened out of the eastern wall of the transept, where a hanging lamp shed a dim light

upon the painted image of a saint. Entering the chapel, De Carloo plucked down the lamp and brought it in his sacrilegious hand.

A moment's search revealed a narrow door on the opposite side of the great pier to that in which the iron grille was riveted, and against which the iron portal opened, veiled by the curtain.

"Excellent," said De Carloo. "Now, M. Hilarion, if you will await me here I will make trial of the passage."

The door was unlocked, and, passing through it, De Carloo vanished up the narrow and steep stairway.

D'Orchimont leant his back against the column and gazed up at the painted window that filled the end wall of the transept: outside, coloured argosies of cloud voyaged across a sky still radiant with hues of sunset; and beheld against the shadowy and bright heavens, the dim hierarchy of kings and prophets in the glass seemed to move and their faces to change. Were the stones of the vaulted roof to fall upon his head, or the pavement to split and gape beneath his feet, the ex-monk would not have been amazed at such a judgment; for the little snake lurking in the dark of his mind moved and whispered, and he saw himself accessory to a horrible sacrilege. And meanwhile the pains of

suspense took hold upon him. Once again d'Orchimont found himself awaiting, in a torturing uncertainty, the chance coming of his mistress. The footsteps of De Carloo echoed faintly from the body of the church and died away. From the tower overhead fell the chiming of the clock. D'Orchimont began to count the hurried pulsations of his heart; the perspiration broke out upon him, and the joints of his limbs were loosened. Presently he heard De Carloo returning, and, at the same moment, a latch clicked and the door in the end wall of the transept moaned upon its hinges. D'Orchimont sprang erect, trembling. A hooded figure advanced from the shadow beneath the window and stopped, the faint light falling about it like a halo. D'Orchimont went desperately forward, strung to the performance of his resolution.

"Mistress Jacqueline . . ." he said.

She yielded her hand to him and he carried it to his lips.

D'Orchimont launched himself headlong: "Madam, I have sought you again, as I shall do all my life days, an you forbid me not. Mistress Jacqueline, there is something afoot to-night upon which may ensue great consequences. I can tell you no more than that. Will you trust me? Will you, an events fall out so, let me take you away?"

She had not withdrawn her hand, and d'Orchimont, with a momentary wonder at his daring, put his arm about her.

"Ah, what is that?" whispered the Countess, as De Carloo's footfalls echoed overhead, and a ray of light fell athwart the darkness of the nave.

"'Tis a friend," said d'Orchimont. "There is nought to fear."

De Carloo emerged from the stairway in the great pier, the lamp he carried lighting up his frock, which was powdered with thick dust and laced with cobwebs. He replaced the lamp upon the altar in the chapel and returned towards d'Orchimont and Mistress Jacqueline, who had withdrawn herself a little.

"The way is fortunately open, M. Hilarion," he murmured, in his profoundest tones. "When I go, it will depend upon your conveniences whether you follow me or not. You have your own affairs to conduct; but if I can serve you I beg you to command me. Meanwhile, permit me to keep watch for the return of this Sacristan;" and the square, alert figure shrouded in the voluminous frock disappeared into the gloom.

"You do not still distrust me?" said d'Orchimont, finding the words with difficulty.

"No," she said.

There was a little silence, broken by the

chiming of the clock. Jacqueline put her hands before her face, and d'Orchimont divined that she was weeping. He made a step forward and touched her. For a moment her forehead rested against his shoulder, and with all his pity for her, d'Orchimont was fulfilled with a kind of troubled joy; but he remembered the conditions of his service, and bound himself with a strong constraint.

"But whither can we go?" whispered Jacqueline, looking up.

"To Liége, madam. To my Lord Bishop, who honoured me with this charge. My Lord gave me this ring," said d'Orchimont.

It had fallen too dark by this time to discern so little an object as the bezel of a ring, save by the sense of touch. D'Orchimont kneeled upon the stones, and Jacqueline's left hand passed upon his bowed head.

"Pardon, M. Hilarion," growled a bass-viol from out the darkness, "but it appears to me that this Sacristan is about to return."

As De Carloo spoke a bell began to toll. D'Orchimont got swiftly to his feet.

"Shall I return for the next office?" asked the Countess.

"No, I think not," replied d'Orchimont, after a moment's intense consideration.

"*Adieu*, then."

"*Adieu . . .*"

She was gone like a shadow. D'Orchimont stood gazing after her, rent by a tumult of he knew not what poignant emotions, conscious only of the pressure of her fingers that lingered upon his own.

"Pardon, M. Dom Hilarion," said De Carloo at his elbow, "but permit me to suggest that before the entrance of this damned Sacristan, you should discover some comfortable place of retirement, as near at hand as may be. This confessional, for example. How would that serve you? And when this mass shall have finished I beg you to observe my movements."

As the western door creaked open, d'Orchimont took refuge within a confessional that stood in a corner of the transept, and drew the curtain close, while De Carloo vanished behind the little door giving upon the stairway inside the pillar.

The Sacristan, bearing a lighted taper, relit the candles in the transept and those in the choir, and a few minutes afterwards the monks thronged into the church, while the persons of the Duke's household began to enter from the guest-house. D'Orchimont, peering between his curtains, discerned the hooded figure of De Carloo standing in the doorway of the pillar, half hidden by the door. At this moment a procession of gentlemen entered the transept

and passed through the curtained doorway into the body of the church. Among them, thought d'Orchimont, was doubtless the great Duke: but, ignorant as he was of the rules of precedence, the ex-monk had no means whereby he might distinguish the Governor-General; nor, from his position on the right of the door by which they had entered, was he able to discern their faces. The black curtain dropped behind the retinue, and with the chanting of a Latin hymn the service began. After the prayers followed a sermon. D'Orchimont, fretting with suspense, marvelled how any created being could endure so dreary a discourse, of a length so immeasurable. When at last the orator pronounced the benediction, d'Orchimont got to his feet and put aside the veil of the confessional.

There was a stir and rustle, and a clatter of accoutrements as the ladies and gentlemen of the household rose to their feet; d'Orchimont saw De Carloo glide from the dark archway in the pillar and stand against the curtain drooping across the doorway between the transept and the nave. There fell a measured tramp of great Spanish boots upon the pavement: the curtain was drawn aside, and (as before) a hand held it back: a tall figure appeared in the opening; and at the same moment, d'Orchimont saw a flash of steel as De Carloo raised his hand and, lunging

forward, dealt a blow. With a broken cry, the figure swayed and fell backwards. In the second's pause that followed, d'Orchimont ran forward, caught a vehement gesture from De Carloo as the assassin leaped through the staircase door, and followed him. De Carloo instantly clapped-to the door and shot the wooden bar into its staple.

"Lost!" he murmured as they ran up the stair, his bass tones changing to a high, broken whisper. "All lost! 'Twas not the Duke. Save ourselves."

Stooping beneath the low arches of the clerestory gallery, now and again dashing themselves against some projection of stonework, the fugitives made the circuit of the church. A tumult had arisen below, which increased every moment; amid a confused noise of cries and loud talking a deep voice bellowed commands. Men ran hither and thither, thrusting the monks aside, while a throng of persons surrounded the wounded man, one of whom held a light above two or three figures that knelt beside him. So much d'Orchimont saw at a glance, as he paused for a second before descending the further stair. The two gained the courtyard, which was empty, turned through an archway into the great garden, escaladed the wall, and escaped into the forest unobserved.

All that night the regiment of horse led by the Seigneur de Risoir and the Seigneur de Carloo rode overthwart and endlong towards the German frontier: while the troop of Beggars under The Wild-Cat marched swiftly towards Friesland: and Don Christóbal de Zuñiga, filled with impotent wrath, lay sleepless, with a burning wound in his left breast.

"We have no luck, my son, no luck, you see," remarked The Wild-Cat to d'Orchimont, who marched at his stirrup. "How was De Carloo to know that the Señor *Duque* would have the impiety to weary of the sermon, and so quit the sanctuary by the privy door before 'twas ended? So here are we, marching towards a pitched battle, instead of feasting in the palace of Jauche in Brussels. And the Don continues to woo the Countess, while the Master-Beggar tramps the wold. No luck: we have no luck at all, my son."

But Master Philip d'Orchimont possessed a secret consolation of which The Wild-Cat knew nothing.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIRE KINDLES.

For fifteen days d'Orchimont, following The Wild-Cat north-eastward across the country, marched amid a phantasmal procession of strange and dreadful stories that darkened the sky above him. For the broken gentlemen, soldiers of fortune, sons of burgesses from out the great cities, and peasants, who daily increased the Beggars' ranks, still brought tales of Spanish oppression, Spanish outrage, Spanish extortion, and the ineluctable machinations of the Inquisition.

All the roads were filled with long, hooded wains piled with the household goods of the folk who trudged beside them, mile after mile, towards the sea beyond which promised the liberties of England; and all along the rivers and canals barges floated seawards, laden deep with emigrant cargoes. Driven from house and land, the people wore a hunted and dispiriting aspect: and jumbled in a sad disarray, the tall clocks, the brazen vessels, the parcels of coloured bedding, peered from hooded waggon or barge's

deck with the sad look of live things torn up by the roots, and carried away to wither.

Meanwhile, tidings came from the south, where the Prince of Orange lay at Cleves awaiting the turn of events with a reserve of men-at-arms, that the Seigneur de Villars was about to cross the frontier near Maestricht with an army of three thousand patriots, while the Seigneur de Cocqueville entered the Netherlands from France with a force of Huguenot gentlemen and refugees. At the same time, Louis of Nassau would advance from the north-east into Friesland: and the three armies, converging at once upon the Spaniard, were to begin and end the war at a blow. Throughout the whole land, the smouldering fires of rebellion were breaking into flame.

To d'Orchimont, the stream of whose desires set wholly towards a star, the tide of national affairs, rising in flood, seemed to carry him directly towards the bourne of his ambition. For no way now remained by which he might win his mistress, save the conquest of the Spaniard; and lo! God was leading great armies from the east and south and west which should drive the Blackbeards into the sea.

Upon the 20th of April The Wild-Cat and his train found Louis of Nassau with some thousands of rebels encamped about the little, de-

fenceless town of Dam, in Friesland, near the estuary of the river Dollart. Here the Beggars took up their quarters, making for themselves mud huts, roofed with branches and turf or tent-cloth: and here, in this rough city of soldiers, set with embroidered standards twinkling in the wind above a brown wilderness of booths: plangent with shrilling tuckets and rumbling drums, clamorous with sentries' calls; d'Orchimont, entering into the toilsome existence of a man-at-arms, found it to differ somewhat from his shining anticipations.

Turned out in the bitter dawn to labour with mattock and shovel at the earthworks that were rising about the encampment: summoned from the entrenchments to fall into rank, pike in hand, and execute hours of arduous drill under the objurgations of some passionate veteran: or to go marching heavy leagues with a foraging party, returning laden to the dust with provender: and if any interval befel, taken by The Wild-Cat or Thibault (that redoubtable master) for instruction in sword and buckler practice, rapier and dagger exercise, rapier alone (when time and again the novice gave himself up for dead before the blades of these gladiators), or shooting at a mark; d'Orchimont, coping day after day with these formidable labours, speedily perceived that new forces totally usurped his

soul. Ambition and love drowsed and slumbered deep within him: the wheels of thought ran down: self-consciousness decreased; and he began to enjoy something of the careless hebetude of the animal existence. But two emotions lived in his mind: the sense of loss, of want, which had ached within him ever since he parted from Jacqueline de Mirlamont upon the bridge of the iron crucifix: and a growing conviction that affairs were flowing in so swift and undivided a course towards the desired consummation, that some sacrifice would surely be exacted to set the balance even. And from these two notions sprang a third: the expectation of his own death, as the price required by an ironical fate, began imperceptibly to shape itself in d'Orchimont's imagination.

And so it was, by a curious, illogical inversion of ideas, that when intelligence came of the Seigneur de Villars' total defeat at Daelhem on the 25th of April, d'Orchimont experienced a sudden sense of relief. The balance of the average was redressed. The chances of ultimate success were lessened. There remained, therefore, no more reason why Philip d'Orchimont should be slain before any other hopeful Master-Beggar.

But indefatigable labour in the open air so dulls the mental edge that d'Orchimont, save at

rare intervals when weariness kept him from sleep, was no more than half conscious of this circular track of thought: the most of the time he was oblivious of all except the immediate business of the moment.

For some three weeks after the tidings of the Seigneur de Villars' defeat had reached the camp, Louis of Nassau maintained his forces at Dam, which were continually augmented by the arrival of new regiments. Adolphus of Nassau, Louis' younger brother, came with a troop of horse. Companies of German mercenaries, horsemen in great boots, iron caps, breast- and back-plates, armed with lance or arquebus and long sword: regiments of Huguenot gentlemen from France, in tarnished finery, some wearing armour, but the most of them habited in doublet and cloak, came riding in: while the heavy, square Frisian peasants filtered into the camp continuously, armed with the rustical weapons of husbandry.

"Do you see yon bird of omen?" said The Wild-Cat to d'Orchimont, as they were walking upon the outskirts of the camp. "We shall come to a battle very soon."

Following the other's glance, d'Orchimont perceived a burly cavalier in a rusty corselet riding at the head of five or six mounted men-at-arms, each of whom led a sumpter-mule.

He was a black man, with a heavy brow and a great square chin, and wore something of a piratical aspect.

"That is the Scot, Captain Robert Stuart of Doullen," continued The Wild-Cat. "One of those northern soldiers of fortune who quit in desperation the barbarous crags of their birthplace, and overspread the whole world, gathering plunder at the sword's point. The eagle, you see, has winded the carcase. A rich prey is the Spaniard, and so Captain Robert will fight for the Beggars: and howsoever the battle goes, Stuart will ride away to Doullen with a train of mules laden to bursting. They call him Stuart of Doullen since he stormed and garrisoned the town of Doullen in the Western Netherlands: where (because no one cares to turn him out) he dwells like a great seigneur. 'Twas this same Captain Robert who shot the constable Anne de Montmorency, fighting for the Huguenots at the battle of Saint-Denis."

D'Orchimont regarded this desperado with awe: and sure enough, the next morning a rumour ran about the camp that the Spanish army was advancing under Count d'Arenberg (torn from the side of Mademoiselle de Châteauneuf by the implacable Alva) and Don Gonzalo de Braccamonte, who commanded the renowned Sardinian Legion: and during the day outposts,

driven in, announced the near approach of the enemy. That night the camp slept upon its arms, and in the morning a regiment of arquebusiers marched out in skirmishing order, while the main body of the Beggars were drawn up under arms within their entrenchments.

The Wild-Cat and his company mounted to the top of the earthworks: and, with the sun warm upon their backs, sat there to enjoy the spectacle. The flat, half-cultivated country, smeared with a vivid green and flashing here and there with water, stretched away and was lost in a rosy haze that melted into the sky; and from high overhead, fell the gay fifing of the larks. Out of the haze crawled a long, low mass twinkling with innumerable points of light: from which a sinuous body detached itself, and grew slowly into the likeness of tiny men marching in a phalanx, sprinkled with bright dots of flags. Presently the Beggars' arquebusiers, who had spread themselves in open order right across the plain, began to fire, to run forward, fire again, and again to advance. A continual series of explosions silenced the voices of the birds, and the smoke, rolling in billows, blotted out the prospect. Now and again the wind clove rifts in the dun vapour, revealing answering flashes, amid a further bank of smoke, and the black figures of the Beggars running,

as they sought to shelter their advance behind every tree, hovel, barn, or rising ground. A small party gained possession of a windmill that stood upon a knoll about midway between the Beggars' camp and the enemy: and firing from its apertures, they speedily transformed it into a tower of wreathing smoke. The noise of battle rolled further and further away: the movements of the combatants became more and more difficult to discern: the hours slipped away; and the Beggars, placidly eating their dinner on the breastworks, said to each other that the arquebusiers were beating back the advanced guard of the Blackbeards.

But as the afternoon wore on the firing grew more desultory: detached bodies of men scattered across the plain were seen to mingle with a tiny coruscation of steel and violently to separate: beyond them, the declining sun gleamed upon the armour of a host advancing like a square, flat monster, with glinting points and banners unfurled. The red sash worn by the Spanish men-at-arms became visible. Some of the conflicting bodies in front broke and scattered into single fugitives flying towards the Beggars' camp: where trumpets were sounding and drums were rolling. The skirmishers were in full retreat, and the whole force of Spaniards was marching upon the town of Dam.

D'Orchimont stood in his place in the ranks, supporting a twelve-foot pike and staring at the phantom of his own death which had suddenly risen again, full-armed, out of the sunset glow that burned beyond the darkening fields; where a confusion of dim figures weltered in a fiery haze. The tumultuous murmur and the cries of battle grew nearer. A wave of men surged about the windmill: flashes spouted from its sides: the wave subsided and passed on, leaving the black fabric solitary, with rifts and holes through which peered the red sunset. Three or four stragglers came running towards the open gateway in the breastwork: one of whom stumbled and fell all his length as he reached it, and lay still. The next moment a rolling crash of musketry burst from the dusky masses in front; and d'Orchimont heard the bullets drone overhead like a swarm of homing bees. He bent his head, and with a swift impulse of shame glanced at his companions. But they were gazing in front of them with a fixed attention, and muttering oaths and scraps of imbecility like men who gibber in their sleep. Out of the lazy smoke wreathing in front of the Spanish ranks emerged a crowd of fleeing figures. An intermittent firing again broke out of the dark behind them: the bullets whined or sang in the air with a singular variety of note; but there

was no more pursuit. Presently the shots ceased, and the Spaniards drew back into the gathering darkness.

Trumpets shrilled far and near, orders ran through the camp to make ready for an immediate retreat: and amid the ensuing hurry of his thoughts, d'Orchimont perceived that the Beggars were beaten from their entrenchments without a blow struck. He owed his continued existence, it appeared, to the pusillanimity of his leaders, whom he cursed as he walked, with a bitter, unreasoning anger. The stress of the long day had exhausted his faculties, and a black veil shut down in front of his inward vision, through which he discerned his rich future as an enchanted garden from which he was for ever exiled.

Towards midnight, when the army of the Beggars was defiling along the road of the Wold-weg, a causeway leading to Heiliger-Lee across a wide morass where the stars glimmered in the water, The Wild-Cat rode up beside d'Orchimont.

"'Tis a fine night for strategy, Master Philip," said he. "Warfare is not all cut-and-thrust, onfall and outfall, you see. 'Tis sometimes but idling in the sun while other gentlemen are fighting to amuse you, and a cool walk at midnight towards comfortable quarters, and those

in a monastery, too, now I bethink me. Why, 'tis near upon six weeks since thou hast been within a convent. You will be at home once more, Philip, and able to shrive yourself at ease before the fighting."

More than the words he said, the tones of the Master-Beggar's jolly voice cheered the despondent recruit: the dark veil shrivelled and vanished; and he marched under the stars with a lightened heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BATTLE OF THE HOLY LION.

The next day the Master-Beggars were quartered about the village and monastery (whence the Abbot had taken flight) of Heiliger-Lee (The Holy Lion), and here circumstances misinterpreted having wrought the counterpart of d'Orchimont's bitter mood upon the patriot army, it broke into a sudden flame of mutiny: which, however, was as speedily quelled by Louis of Nassau's address, as d'Orchimont had been restored by the tact of his captain.

Upon the afternoon of the same day, d'Orchimont sat at dinner in the refectory of the convent, among the men-at-arms: round the high table upon the daïs, were seated Louis of Nassau and his brother, The Wild-Cat, and other captains. Outside the tall windows, which were open to the air, the new foliage of the wood embowering the monastery rose against the bright sky: and in the pauses of the talk fell the lazy croaking of the rooks circling about the tree-tops. Glancing aside from his abstracted contemplation of this serene prospect, d'Orchimont

perceived a man in peasant's dress staring into the chamber from the dark arch of the doorway. There was so strong an impression of agitation upon this figure, that it seemed to stand within a rising column of heated air that stirred its garments and quivered before its features. At the same moment, some one at the high table called to the stranger; who entered and padded heavily up the room with bare feet, like a man half dead with running. He was splashed and stained with mud and water and green slime, bits of water-weed trailed about him, his rusty hair was matted low upon his forehead, and his dull face was dark and pale in patches that came and went as he panted. There was a breathing silence as the man dropped on his knee and muttered some words in a broken whisper.

Louis of Nassau got to his feet, a goblet of wine in his hand.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "the Count d'Arenberg and Señor Don Gonzalo de Braccamonte, have done us the honour to follow in the Master-Beggars' footsteps so far as Winschoten. To-morrow, gentlemen, by the blessing of God, we shall send them out of the land of the living. *Vive le Roi et les Gueulx!*"

And the next morning, d'Orchimont, pike in hand, stood in the ranks of his company, which formed part of one of the two great squares,

flanked by musketeers, into which the main body of the army was divided. To his left, about a quarter of a mile distant, stood the second square, at the foot of the wooded hill upon the summit of which stood the Monastery of The Holy Lion. Upon the lower slopes of the hill was posted a troop of light-armed skirmishers. Right across the front of the Beggars' position spread a great field of marsh and quagmire intersected by weed-grown ditches. The sun, breaking from a gorgeous retinue of cloud, transformed the swamp into a green and shining plain, shot with silver gleams: illumined the roof of the wood on the left, opposite the monastery hill, and clothed it with a broad purple shadow.

An eddy of birds circled above the trees, for down the road which ran through the midst of the wood the Spanish battalions were advancing: and the earth vibrated with the ominous trampling of thousands.

So matters had come to push of pike at last: and in the release from long suspense, d'Orchimont felt an elation of body and spirit, as though he breathed the air of a high mountain; his phantoms of terror all consumed in a burning curiosity. His tall, gleaming weapon thrilled in his hand: and seemed to look at him with an expression of dumb, invincible courage.

Presently there came the dull explosion of a

cannon, and wreaths of dirty smoke burst from within the delicate green veil of the wood in front. D'Orchimont was taken with an instant conviction that the iron ball screaming its way overhead must inevitably strike him. But it buried itself in the hill to the left: and the new soldier felt a little glow of pleasure at his escape. Five shots followed at measured intervals, each one with a more portentous explosion than the last: for the Spaniards, in passing through the city of Groningen, had requisitioned its six famous cannon, which were named after the notes of the gamut, *Ut*, *Re*, *Mi*, *Fa*, *Sol*, *La:* and at each reverberation of this tremendous instrument, d'Orchimont felt the same sudden drain of courage, and the same prickling reaction: and in the outcome, a sense of pleasure. But as the cannonade continued, the emotion diminished: until he wearied of the thunder and the yelling missiles. On the shoulder of the hill to the left d'Orchimont perceived a scattered crowd of tiny figures running across open patches of ground, and in and out among the trees, their backs to the enemy. There was a pause in the firing, and the languid smoke drifted across the bright fields.

Suddenly four or five reports followed in swift succession: one cannon-ball dashed itself into the mud with a thick, wet sound, close to d'Orchi-

mont, bespattering him with mire. Two men of his company were struck: and turning, he caught upon the face of one of them a startled, vivid, indescribable expression: and saw it suddenly and swiftly obliterated, as though a veil of blood were drawn across the features.

At that moment a great noise of cheering arose: and looking towards the wood, d'Orchimont perceived a vast multitude, sown with shifting and glittering points of steel, emerging from the smoke into the open. Instantly a crashing discharge broke from the ranks of musketeers flanking the main columns of the Beggars; and for a long time the smoke of their firing blotted out the whole prospect. Suddenly the order to advance rang out, and was repeated far and near: the whole battalion began to run forward: and d'Orchimont found himself a tiny fraction of a gigantic movement sufficient (he thought) to bear down and leave in fragments a walled city. An enormous shouting of "Daelhem! Daelhem!" went up: and d'Orchimont, at that supreme moment, was filled with so mighty a fervour of exultation that he afterwards pictured himself as of more than mortal stature, burning with a great flame that leaped towards the sky.

As they ran, the smoke blew away, revealing the whole Spanish vanguard floundering waist-deep in the morass. A vision of a multitude of

dark men with moving eyeballs, and white teeth, striking furiously, and crying and shrieking in an unknown tongue, swept upon d'Orchimont's sight: the next moment, seized with the intoxication of battle, he was furiously plying his pike in the mellay, thrusting the Blackbeards choking into the ooze.

The Master-Beggars, native to these watery wastes, kept their footing and slew at their ease: moreover, they outnumbered the Spaniards by two to one: and inside of half-an-hour, the whole field was heaving with writhen corpses, and redolent of blood. Meanwhile, the second column of the Beggars' army, which had been posted at the base of the hill, fetching a compass, charged into the wood behind the Spaniards' rearguard, and fell upon them. So it was that d'Orchimont, seeing no more red scarves to thrust at, soaked with sweat, wrung with extraordinary exertion, his pulses beating like hammers, leaned upon his dripping pike, and looking towards the Spanish position, perceived a great multitude streaming slantwise from the wood, and taking to flight across the fields. Ahead of them, stooping on his horse's neck, ran a cavalier in bright armour, no other than Señor Don Gonzalo de Braccamonte himself. Swords flashed and fell, and pikes darted amid the fleeing mass: and the noise of crying and shouting went up in a roaring torrent.

The whole body of the Beggars about d'Orchimont, flushed with slaughter, stood gazing and shouting: when suddenly a troop of cavalry in full armour, riding knee to knee, burst from the wood and came charging down the wide causeway leading to the monastery, a single cavalier riding some paces ahead of them. Across the road the Master-Beggars' scanty regiment of cavalry was drawn up, with Adolphus of Nassau sitting his horse, hand on hip, in advance of his troop. The Beggars, their attention diverted from the pursuit that went roaring into the distance, turned with one accord, and remaining immobile where they stood among the confusion of bemired and floating dead, watched the meeting of those two renowned captains, the Count d'Arenberg and Adolphus of Nassau, as though the scene went forward in a playhouse. D'Orchimont saw Count d'Arenberg throw up his left hand as he rode, and saw the flash of a pistol. The air was so filled with clashing vibrations that no explosion was audible. The next moment the riders dashed together: there was an instantaneous lightening of swords: and the younger Nassau swung backwards out of his saddle. The impetus of his charge carried Count d'Arenberg into the midst of his enemies. With a stroke to right and left, he cut down two men: and the next instant the two troops met and mingled

with a great shock. At that the Beggars looking on rushed forward: and d'Orchimont was carried along with them. The ranks parting in front of him to avoid a great pool choked with dead Spaniards, he caught a fleeting glimpse of five or six cavaliers riding away, who seemed to support a horse and rider in their midst. The rushing crowd closing up once more, for several minutes d'Orchimont ran blindly forward among them, flung this way and that. Suddenly the onward movement checked: blows rang about him: and d'Orchimont found himself face to face with a great knight in bloody armour, with one hand pressing his side, who swung up a long sword. D'Orchimont saw the ripple of light upon the blade as it cut the sky: beheld and noted in a flash the man's wide eyes, ringed with black, that glowed like lamps from out a grey face; and, hardly knowing what he did, thrust strongly with his pike. The blade pierced the knight's gorget; and he tumbled backwards. Amid the eager cries that went up from the men around, clustering about the fallen man, it was presently borne in upon d'Orchimont's fermenting consciousness, that he, Philip d'Orchimont—albeit his adversary was already wounded, and crippled by sickness—had slain the great Count d'Arenberg.

At the same time he was conscious of a sudden

pause and silence: for the tide of battle was ebbing fast: the pursuing Beggars were returning: and not a Spaniard was left to slay. All over the battle-field stragglers were plundering the slain, raking them in heaps from the pools and ditches with their halberds. A dizzy haze shimmered upon the surface of the marsh: and the rays of the declining sun, lighting here and there upon an upturned face, seemed to strike it into a horrible smile.

D'Orchimont was taken with a sudden sensation of nausea, and a deadly exhaustion: and turning away, he plodded heavily back towards the monastery, his head sunk upon his breast. His clothes were mere sops upon him, he was caked with mire, and darkly stained and crusted with blood.

His brain whirled with the fever of conflict, mechanically reproducing the day's incidents before his eyes in a revolving cycle of vivid images: so that he saw again the moving wave of dark faces with shining eyeballs and teeth, twitching horribly: the oily streaks churning with green weed and black water: he felt in his marrow the jar of steel against steel, the grisly shear of steel through muscle and bone: and there rang in his ears the scream of horses and the din of cries and the indescribable noises of the wounded. But accompanying this dance of phantoms, his

heart chanted a wordless pæan of triumph: and apart from it all, the tide of his desires, having borne down a great barrier, set smoothly towards a star.

Upon reaching the courtyard of the monastery, d'Orchimont found it thronged with a noisy crowd of hoarse men-at-arms, all bloody and dishevelled as himself, gathered about a group of mounted men. Pushing his way towards the inside of the ring, d'Orchimont perceived Captain Robert Stuart of Doullen, who was engaged in vigorous argument with Louis of Nassau and The Wild-Cat. Both Captain Robert and his horse presented an excessively wild and filthy aspect: but the dark face of the Scotchman was as clean, calm, and sober as though he had but just returned from hearing mass. Behind him, a couple of mounted serving-men held two mules by the bridle, upon each of which a priest was seated, with his ankles tied under his steed's belly. The soldier of fortune had culled them on the wayside, where the Spaniards, with whom they had sought refuge, had left them.

"Come, sir," cried the strong, harsh voice of Captain Stuart, "I offer you the Abbot of Heiliger-Lee, and the Abbot of Wittewerum, the captives of my bow and of my spear, at a price. What the devil! do you stick at such a bargain? Do you think I would sell you two such brim-

ming vessels of ill-got gold, had I but leisure to tarry while these excellent prelates sweated out a proportionate ransom?"

"It appears to me that you mistake a little the situation, Captain," said Louis of Nassau. He was sitting bareheaded on his horse, a short, burly figure, with a round, bald forehead, a commanding eye, and close-cropped beard brushing the ruff he wore instead of gorget. "Permit me to remind you that prisoners of war remain at the disposal of the Commander."

"Certainly, Count, but in exchange for prize-money," retorted Stuart.

"Ay, call it prize-money, Count," said The Wild-Cat, twisting his beard in his fingers. "Call it black-mail. Call it the Scottish tribute."

"My hand has grown to my sword-hilt this day, in the Master-Beggars' quarrel," cried the Scot. "But if," and he looked eagerly at The Wild-Cat, "there is any gentleman that calls me in question upon a point of military usage, I will ask him to put his sword under his arm, and to step aside with me, that we may arrive at an agreement in this disputation."

The Wild-Cat laughed silently. "Here is that courageous gentleman," said he. "At your service, Captain Stuart." A murmur went up from the listening Beggars.

"*Peste!* What folly is this? There is no such question, Captain Robert Stuart," interposed Nassau. "Come, sir. What is it precisely you are pleased to demand?"

"Sir Count, I was born a precisian," answered the Scot. "I would have fifty ducats for each of these holy fathers. Pay me in Spanish dollars, rixthalers, guilders, florins or French crowns—'tis all one. One hundred ducatoons. *Dame!* this is no Barbary slave-market, Count! Shall we chaffer and fall out over the price of two grey-haired priests of God?"

"Nevertheless, my good friend, let me ask you to bate your demands somewhat," said Count Louis: who, knowing his pay-chest to be empty, was yet unwilling to alienate a powerful ally.

The Scot turned swiftly in his saddle. "Thiry," said he, "take me your petronel and shoot me holy Wittewerum through the head. Michel, do you the same by sacred Heiliger-Lee."

The fellows lugged out their weapons: and the plump, fresh-faced, grey-haired Abbot of Wittewerum broke immediately into a great sobbing, stretching out his arms and crying for mercy in a weeping voice: but his brother of Heiliger-Lee, a little, dull, dark man, sat still upon his mule, his face stricken suddenly into a mask of terror.

"Down with your pistols, knaves," cried

Louis, instantly, and the men looked round, hesitating, with their weapons poised.

"Set me free to enter my house, and I will pay the money, I," cried the Abbot of Heiliger-Lee. "Sirs, sirs, would ye kill a priest, a mitred Abbot? O yes, I will pay the money." The hapless churchman gazed about him, his lips moving silently. The Beggars set up a laugh.

"Cut his bonds, Michel," said Captain Robert. "Go with him, and count the money."

The crowd opened before the priest, who was shrunken together with terror, and the man-at-arms following him, petronel in hand.

Perhaps this solution of the problem was welcome to both the disputing parties: who maintained a dignified silence until the Abbot returned carrying a little sack, with the soldier still close upon his heels. Going up to Captain Stuart, the priest gave the sack into his hand, without a word: and stood looking at the ground, with his lips sucked in.

The Scot cut the string of the bag with his poniard, and plunging in his hand, flung a handful of money to right and left among the Beggars. Then he pulled off his hat, and saluted Count Louis and his retinue.

"Set the holy father free, sirrah," said Captain Stuart, as he wheeled his horse. The man-at-arms cut the rope that bound the Abbot of

Wittewerum to his mule: and the Scot, as he passed, pricked the animal with his spurred heel, so that it flung the Abbot on the ground. Without looking round, Captain Robert Stuart and his following passed out of the convent gateway, and set their faces towards the town of Doullen in Western Flanders.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BELL OF SAINT GUDULE.

JACQUELINE DE MIRLAMONT, caged alone in her chamber in the Duke of Alva's palace at Brussels,* stood gazing from her window. The grey street, and the shuttered houses opposite, wore a desolate and mourning aspect, as though a plague were upon the city. Since early morning, the great bell of Saint Gudule's Cathedral had been tolling at measured intervals, filling the whole air with black waves of dolorous vibration, that beat implacably upon the girl's aching consciousness. Little more than a week since, the news had come of the Spanish defeat at Heiliger-Lee. Jacqueline knew that Philip d'Orchimont was fighting somewhere in the wastes of Frisia: and if he were slain, what were the Master-Beggars' victory to her? The Countess began to suffer the relentless pains of suspense. And but three days before, she had come unawares upon seven headless corpses blackening upon gibbets in the Horse-Market, the relics of a wholesale execution performed by order of the Duke upon the day preceding.

Since then, Jacqueline had shut herself in her

* Two hundred and thirty odd years later the Duke of Wellington looked out of a certain window in Brussels, after Waterloo; and a hundred years after that the German soldiers filled the city.

own apartments: not because the shock of physical repulsion had greatly affected her; for the ladies of that epoch were not easily daunted: but by reason of her intuition of the Duke's immeasurable wrath against the Beggars, of the thunder-cloud of ruthless vengeance that loured upon them: of which the sword of the headsman, which had flashed and reddened almost daily in the Horse-Market since the fatal victory of Heiliger-Lee, was but the first lightening of the storm. Soon afterwards, Maria Desirotte brought the news to her mistress of the Seigneur de Villars' torture, confession, and execution: the day following, of the arrival from Ghent, under a strong escort, of Lamoral d'Egmont, Prince of Gaveren, and Philip Montmorency, Count of Horn. And yesterday, the whole city knew that the Duke of Alva had signed the two nobles' death-sentence: and to-day, borne down by a haunting dread and horror, a profound gloom, Jacqueline hearkened to their passing-bell.

The clock of the palace was striking noon, the chimes mingling dissonantly with the tolling from the Cathedral, when the Countess perceived the figure of a man, attired in black, with an orange-tawny plume in his broad hat, crossing the deserted street towards the entrance. A few moments later Maria Desirotte entered, saying that Señor Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova

waited below. A singular change had passed upon the waiting-maid, once so jaunty and so gay. Her whole appearance was subdued and wan, and she wore a curious hunted look.

At a word from her mistress, Maria Desirotte retired, and presently Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova entered the room.

Jacqueline turned to him, her face eloquent with a question. The Spaniard replied with a mournful gesture.

"'Tis ended, Madam," he said.

The girl sank into a chair, put her hands before her face, and sobbed. Don Miguel stood watching her with a grave composure. The great bell sounded heavily.

"Madam," said Don Miguel, "these gentlemen . . . are they not made free from a very weary coil?"

"I am thinking of them that are left," said the Countess, looking up. Tears stood upon her cheeks, her grey eyes looked through tears, her face was lit by a spark of anger.

"Ay, Madam—'tis of them I came to speak to you."

"Pray you be seated, Señor," said Jacqueline. "Truly, I am glad you are come. O, I cannot bear this horrible tolling." She leaned her elbows on the heavy carven table beside her chair, pressing her hands upon her forehead.

The Spaniard regarded her with his former grave silence, in which there was something of a delicate courtesy, something of compassion. Perhaps his sedate composure, which, in some subtle way, implied that beneath it lay neither dulness nor insensibility, but a quick comprehension, wrought its effect upon the Countess: for she presently sat erect, with some appearance of determination, and that angry spark still smouldering.

"Will you permit me, Madam," said Don Miguel, "to speak to you a moment of yourself?"

"Surely, Señor."

"Countess, I know that your life and fortunes are held at the absolute disposal of the Duke. And I have permitted myself to hope that you will tell me, before I go from this city, if you are content that your affairs should be thus ordered."

"Before you go from this city, Señor? Are you then departing?"

"Upon a long journey, Madam: and yet, did I remain, I should be sped upon a longer, and to a bourne unknown." The distant note of the bell, chiming upon the last syllable, seemed to echo it, in a succession of lessening vibrations. With a gesture, and the faint gleam of a smile, the Spaniard put away the sinister suggestion. "And my question, Countess?"

The girl looked at him for a moment, with a very pale and dismayed countenance. Then she flushed swiftly and the latent spark flickered into flame.

"Content, Señor! I am so content, that were the Duke in this room, I would pray the Mother of God to send me might and courage," with her small hand clenched, she struck downwards in the air, "to stab him deep, deep into his heart. Señor, that cruel, bloody, and merciless tyrant has me in a net. My uncle the Bishop, the only one of my kin left in the world, is a poor weak old man, who dreads the Duke more than God or the Devil. The Duke, the Duke! Dear Christ, that mortal man should do such deeds, and live on in the sunlight! He will marry me to Don Rafael de Castañeda. How can I escape? But an if he does, there is a way left open, a way that even the Duke of Alva cannot shut." The gesticulating hand clutched for a moment the front of the stiff, embroidered bodice, then relaxed, as the girl fell back in her chair, with a little choked laugh that was half a sob. The Spaniard, who had listened with his dark eyes upon her, directed his gaze upon the floor, and waited.

"It is curious, Señor," went on Jacqueline, after a minute's silence, in a different voice, "do you remember the night you fell upon the Beg-

gars in the forest?" Regarding her once more, Don Miguel signified assent. "That night, upon your coming, a worthy gentleman gave me this poniard. I have carried it ever since—and now, 'tis your departure puts me in fear that I shall presently be forced to employ this protection. Señor, I thought you would have holpen me." She put her hand over her eyes, and broke into a quiet weeping, like a sorrowful child.

Don Miguel rose, and looked upon her.

"My little friend, take courage," he said, in his own melodious tongue. He put his lean brown hand upon her shoulder for a moment, then moved quietly to the embrasure of the window. The tolling bell filled up the little pause before he spoke again.

"Countess, I fear, since I am so unfortunate as to hold opinions more heretical than the heretics profess themselves, so that I am both proscribed by Catholic and Reformer, and equally a prey to the followers of Torquemada, and the disciples of Doctor Martinus Luther—I fear, alas, I can be of little service to you. Indeed, I think there is but one, Madam, who hath any power to help you."

"Not God," cried Jacqueline. "Do not tell me of God! I will not hear it."

"No," answered the Spaniard, "not God, but a Jew, Madam. One Gabriel de Campuzano Aguilera."

"A Jew, Señor!"

"Pardon me, Countess, I should have said a Nuevo Cristiano," * returned Don Miguel, not without a faint accent of irony. "I have read of a Jew," he added, "who was despised, among other reasons, because he sojourned for awhile in a certain town of ill repute, called Nazareth."

"Is Señor Don Gabriel de—is this great person your friend, Señor?" asked Jacqueline, who had dried her tears.

"Indeed, he honours me with his friendship, Countess. Will you permit me, before my departure, to present to you Don Gabriel?"

"You would do me a great kindness, Señor."

"Yet one more question, Countess. When do you come of age, and so enter into possession of your estates?"

"Not until the thirtieth of July, Señor. Seven weeks and more. The Duke could conquer the world in the time; and he has but to marry his kinsman to one little girl."

"I think the Duke will have more to do than that," said the Spaniard. "The Master-Beggars are seeking his Excellency."

"Can you tell me, Señor, were there many

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* The title by which the Spanish Jews were known, who, under the stringent methods of persuasion employed by Ferdinand and Isabella, adopted, outwardly, the Christian religion.

Beggars slain at Heiliger-Lee?" asked Jacqueline, looking at him with a simple expression of curiosity.

"So far as I can learn, scarce one," returned Don Miguel, meeting her glance with his grave regard.

The notes of the dead-bell, to one person in that chamber, lightened somewhat.

"You are not about quitting Brussels yet, Señor?" said Jacqueline, as the Spaniard took up his great plumed hat.

"Who knows?" he answered, lifting his shoulders. "But I shall permit myself the pleasure of seeing you before my departure, Countess."

"Are you in so great danger, Señor?"

"Is not all life dangerous? There is but the doubtfullest reckoning of chances. One and all stand equally in jeopardy—you, Countess (alas!), the Duke, His most Catholic Majesty the King of Spain, your friend The Wild-Cat and his Master-Beggars—all. Save, perhaps, that Gabriel de Campuzano Aguilera, the Jew, is safer than other men: and even able, at times, if he will, to save others."

"Is he stronger than the Duke of Alva, this Jew, Señor?" asked Jacqueline, curiously, her mind once more diverted from dwelling upon the plight of Don Miguel's affairs.

"Behind the Duke, behind the Duke's jealous

master King Philip, behind the invincible Inquisition itself, sits Don Gabriel the Jew, inscrutable as Fate, rich with great riches, before whose eyes the secret things of the world are spread like an open book," answered Don Miguel. "I cannot answer for his help, Countess: but we may have hope. Farewell, Madam." He kissed the hand she gave him, and the next moment Jacqueline was left alone.

The bell's monotone filled the room once more: but a new hope had sprung up for her, that strove against the boding voice. Standing at the window, the Countess watched the tall black figure with the orange plume, wrapt in a cloak, striding down the empty street: and marvelled that one confessing nameless and dark heresies, should use her with so singular a courtesy, should shew her a friendship so staunch and kind: and found herself wondering, why, despite the Spaniard's polished perfections, she did not set him in her esteem before Philip d'Orchimont, with his blundering simplicity. But Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova was twenty years older than she: moreover, Jacqueline admitted to herself that she stood in some fear of this grave and noble personage: and these, she concluded, were reasons sufficient to account for the posture of her heart's affairs.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DUKE OF ALVA TAKES THE FIELD.

For seven weeks after the battle of The Holy Lion, Count Louis of Nassau, constantly threatened by the mutiny latent among his mercenaries, employed his troops in the levy of blackmail throughout the province: and finally, at the beginning of July, upon receiving news that the Governor-General himself was approaching swiftly with many renowned captains and a great force, Count Louis sat down before the walls of Groningen, with all his army.

Philip d'Orchimont, marching and countermarching, and helping, willy-nilly, to harry the miserable inhabitants, (whose enforced contributions must inevitably expose them to the extremities of Spanish vengeance,) descended by degrees from altitudes of exaltation, through mortification and disappointment, to a state of sullen irritation: of dull rage with his commander. Why, after so great a victory, instead of plundering at large like common freebooters, did not the patriot army march upon the capital? But when there came forewarnings of the Spanish advance,

it dawned upon d'Orchimont's intelligence that the campaign, so far from being accomplished, must be begun all over again. The Master-Beggars' victory, it appeared, had availed them nothing. And d'Orchimont got no more consolation from The Wild-Cat, than he might derive from the contemplation of that captain's unalterable serenity of demeanour.

For a week, the encampment of ten thousand Beggars had lain mutinously grilling in the summer sun, within cannon-shot of Groningen: when the incoming scouts reported that the Duke of Alva had reached the village of Rolden, nine miles the other side of the beleaguered city.

The next morning The Wild-Cat, taking with him Thibault and d'Orchimont, went out upon a little reconnoitring expedition of his own. Making towards Groningen, the three men hid themselves in a clump of willows drooping upon the edge of a broad canal, not far from a large farm-house that stood behind a row of poplars. Beyond the pure, pale landscape, intersected with shining reaches of water, and sown with flowers bright as drops of wine, the roofs of Groningen gleamed through a light rain, over a brown shoulder of rising ground. About the farm-house and outbuildings, men-at-arms with glinting accoutrements were posted: a group of mounted cavaliers stood about the doorway: and

presently a little cavalcade issued from the entrance in the turf wall that enclosed the farm. The three Master-Beggars, peering between the glistening willow-leaves, watched them slowly approach: and presently observed a small man dressed entirely in black, save for his red sash and great boots of yellow leather, and riding a white jennet, to detach himself from the knot of cavaliers, and ride a few paces in advance.

"The Duke of Alva, as I live by bread!" muttered The Wild-Cat. "Sathanas in person. And never an arquebus between us!"

At last, then, d'Orchimont beheld the man beneath whose iron hand the provinces shook and trembled, and burst into fires of rebellion: whose likeness, enthroned amid clouds, the Beggar had vainly tried to body forth in his imagination. Now that mysterious figure, hitherto moving with a countenance unfeatured and blank through the chambers of his mind, should resolve itself into a fixed and vivid image, never to dislimn while memory should endure.

Pausing now and again to search the prospect with a long perspective glass, the Duke and his retinue came on until they halted abreast of the ambushed Master-Beggars, on the further side of the canal.

The Wild-Cat, lying motionless beside d'Orchimont, put his hand with a stealthy and silent

motion to shade his eyes, lest the light, glistening upon them, should attract the Spaniards' attention: whereupon his two companions did the like: and the three scouts lay staring between their fingers at the spare black figure on the white horse, outlined upon the green country and the moving grey sky. D'Orchimont's eyes burned in his head: noting, with an intense particularity, the long oval countenance of the tint of old ivory, diminishing sharply from the domed brow to the forked white beard, so that head and beard made the shape of a radish-root: the menacing eye, that gleamed large, dark and lustrous, undimmed by five and forty years of warfare: the whole aspect thin, fierce, indomitable, with the port of a great commander.

After a minute or two, the little company, wheeling, rode in a slanting direction across the fields, parallel with the Beggars' entrenchments: then returned towards the farm-house; when the three Master-Beggars retreated straightway to the camp.

The Wild-Cat and his men occupied two small houses, each of which commanded a wooden bridge that spanned the river, which ran broad and deep across the front of the Beggars' position. Behind it, stretched swamp and thicket, canal and dyke, with here and there a town or village, for leagues upon leagues. D'Orchimont,

leaning from an upper window, saw dark masses in movement, and the familiar twinkle of steel, upon the rising ground close to the roofs that huddled about the bulbous steeple of Groningen church: saw the clearing sky and departing clouds reflected in the watery plain that lay between, and in the turbid river that glided beneath him; the light gleaming in patches upon the fresh tar with which the posts and rails of the bridge were smeared: and remarking the bundles of faggots, and masses of straw bound to the timbers, and stuffed into crevices, the Beggar picked out places where, in case of need, he would apply one of the pine torches with which the room behind him was piled.

The drums were sounding in the camp and the trumpets calling. Smoke burst in puffs from the ranks advancing from Groningen: the rattle of musketry began: and presently a troop of musketeers marched across the two bridges, and opened an answering fire upon the Spaniards. All that day, under the midsummer sun, across the steaming marsh-flats, in a welter of smoke, the skirmishers on either side advanced, and fired, and retreated, and advanced, with occasional clashes of hand-to-hand conflict: and all that day The Wild-Cat's company, crowding at the windows and about the two little houses by the bridges, watched and waited, as they had

watched and waited on the earthworks at Dam. D'Orchimont kept his place in the upper chamber, despite the breathless heat and the dispiriting smell of the cheeses with which the room had been stored: where The Wild-Cat came and went, occasionally refreshing himself with a long shot from a huge Spanish matchlock, which he rested on the window-sill.

"There will be no fight, comrades, posted as we are," said he. "The Duke will never risk a doubtful victory. 'Tis the greatest master of procrastination that was ever in the world. Moreover the Beggars have no stomach for a great fight: and the damned German riders are clamouring for gelt, gelt, gelt, as usual. Stuff yourselves with victuals and drink as you can, comrades, for I think there is another night-march toward."

D'Orchimont's hope and spirit sank with the sun. Again he saw the moving, plangent field of conflict darken upon a red glow of sunset: and again, out of the coloured dusk, and the drifting smoke, came rushes of flying figures. But now, instead of drawing off, the dark regiments moving across the red glow increased and blackened within gunshot of the camp; and the rush of retreating Beggars became like a rush of frightened sheep.

"Fire the bridges."

The command was in the air, mingled with a great crying and shouting and the continual noise of firing and a hideous half-articulate stress of panic. The room in which d'Orchimont stood was filled in a moment with flame and smoke, and men snatching torches from the pile. Seizing a torch, d'Orchimont lighted it at another and ran out of the house. Tongues of flame leaped and flickered already on the bridge, and in the circling water beneath: and wreathing smoke veiled the red glow. From the camp behind arose an enormous vibration of running footsteps. The army of the Master-Beggars was in full flight, while across the entrance to the burning bridges were drawn up The Wild-Cat's pikemen.

Between the leaping, crackling flames, the towering smoke, and the red glow, the dark wave, bristling into points, undulated swiftly. A multitude of faces sprang suddenly out of the dusk: figures were seen charging forward: the manes of galloping horses tossed upon the glow like spray.

The Wild-Cat cried the word of retreat; and the whole company broke into a run and followed hard upon the track of the main army, their footsteps beating out of time upon the trodden ground of the encampment: beyond, they must separate, and pick their way across the morass as they might. The whole dim expanse was

moving, far ahead of them, with knots of figures fading swiftly from sight: the evening star, farther yet, dropped a broken lance of light athwart the waters of the waste.

D'Orchimont found himself running beside The Wild-Cat. At a little thicket growing on a knoll, The Wild-Cat pulled up, and they turned and looked behind them.

The two bridges were burning high, flinging an angry and wavering light in a wide circle beneath a rolling canopy of smoke, paling the conflagration of sunset: the river, surging in flakes of fire, was choked with swimming horses and men, the riders clinging to their horses' tails: black figures burst across the bridge, and came rushing through the dark, outlined in dropping fire, their clothes and hair burning.

"Lo, the fiends are broken out of hell," said The Wild-Cat. "*Dame!* we had better be going. 'Tis flight this time, and no strategy, *pardieu!*" And he settled himself to run as though it were the business of his life.

Plashing through the spongy mire, bursting through thickets, neck-deep in a broad ditch and swimming for life, sobbing for breath, soaked, rent, bemerded from heel to hair, the flight poured headlong into the darkness; and the pursuit, giving tongue like wolves, followed hard and fast, with a terrible noise and trampling of

running men and galloping horses. A man that fell, or, spent with running, lagged behind, was instantly speared or stabbed, and the furious mob of men and horses swept over his body. So the vanguard of Alva's army hunted the fleeing Beggars until the darkness deepened and the hunters could no longer distinguish aught a spear's length in front of them. The pursuit slackened: the noise of it, and the calling of the Spaniards to one another, fell fainter and fainter, and died away at last: and the Beggars, instinctively gathering together as they went, recovered by degrees some sense of discipline.

All that night, and the four following days, Count Louis led his army (diminished by some six hundred men) towards the south-east; and rounding the inlet of the Dollart, pitched his camp outside the little town of Jemmingen, which stands near the bank of the river Ems.

At first, d'Orchimont followed on the march in a state of sullen desperation. But the most of his fellows in The Wild-Cat's company were inured to a habit of cool recklessness: and used an easy, practical way of living from moment to moment: they had something of the disengagement of despair, although they were as yet far from desperation: something of the fervour of faith, although their piety was to seek: and a certain strain of indomitable courage. And

d'Orchimont, by the force of association, found himself falling into his comrades' attitude of mind: and presently acquired a habit of passive endurance: neither staying himself upon hope, nor declining upon despondency. The spirit of mutiny which was rife in the ragged army but left him contemptuous of the mutineers; and indignant with those mercenaries who, at such a pass, would embarrass the councils of their leaders.

No sooner had the Beggars arrived at Jemmingen, than they began to clamour for the gold which, they obstinately declared, Count Louis of Nassau carried with him: and so, on the morning of the twenty-first of July, with the Duke of Alva and his army of twenty thousand veterans within striking distance, Count Louis must ride in and out among his contumacious regiments, and persuade them back to obedience.

The shadowless dawn was breaking into day beyond the brimming river and the misty fields, as The Wild-Cat and his company, posted about the ravelin upon which were mounted the five cannon that guarded the entrance to the camp, watched the shifting concourse of the Beggars, and listened to the confused murmur, dominated by the voices of the captains.

"See," said The Wild-Cat. "Unless the Beggars overcome the Blackbeards and march clean

over their bodies, they are but dead men all. Count Louis has tied us securely in the end of a bag. Pay or no pay, these discontented gentlemen must fight or be killed."

D'Orchimont, from his place on the bastion, perceived that the river Ems enclosed two sides of a square, upon the left and rear of the Beggars' position: across the front of which, and of the town of Jemmingen, two wide and deep canals, spanned by the ravelin, ran diagonally. For the Ems and the inlet of the Dollart surround a narrow peninsula, of which the tongue of land occupied by the Master-Beggars formed one corner. The vanguard of the Spanish army, as the Beggar leaders suspected, was posted upon the neck of the peninsula. With a sort of pleasure, d'Orchimont recognised that no retreat was possible.

Presently, out of the hurly-burly of the camp, a messenger came running to The Wild-Cat, who immediately despatched the most of his company, to fetch axes, mattocks and shovels; for they were about to open a breach in the dykes and to demolish the bridges across the intersecting canals. Thibault led the brigade, with Louis of Nassau himself, bareheaded, stripped to his shirt, and carrying a spade, walking beside him: and they marched out across the fields; where the rising sun, burning up the mists beyond the

river, flung the Beggars' gliding shadows far across the silver network, glittering with dew, into which the grass was woven. The Wild-Cat, with the rest of his troop, remained to guard the bastion.

About a mile from the camp, the pioneers furiously attacked the huge banks that walled in the moving tons of water. Shovelling and burrowing with an absorbing consciousness of little clots of earth and sand, matted roots, and pebbles, in the pit he drove, d'Orchimont presently saw an oozing trickle of water, which spread and quickened, until the ragged cavity in which he delved with his fellows was gushing with little fountains: and standing upright, he paused a moment and gazed across the plain. The sun illumined a confused, golden, and hazy distance of thickets, ranks of poplars shivering in the breeze, banked canals, vivid green fields and long shadows: amid which, so far distant as to be scarce discernible, hovered a small body of horsemen. The Spaniards were stirring, then. And meanwhile, Count Louis had returned to the camp: from which there came a faint rumbling of drums.

The deadly imminence of the occasion struck sharply upon the diggers. From the first breach they turned to cleave a second, somewhat further from the camp: the water boiling knee-high in

the second, they went swiftly to work upon a third: while a detachment was busied opening tide-gates and sluices, and breaking down bridges. With a rushing sound, the curling lip of the silver waters speedily devoured the pastures, spreading and deepening on every side. A little more, and the Spaniards must give back before an impassable flood: when the Beggars might make good their retreat in boats.

Suddenly, from behind the sappers, a volley rang out: bullets sang overhead, skipped upon the water, or plumped into the earthwork: and turning, d'Orchimont saw a regiment of carabineers galloping towards them through wreathing smoke, splashing knee-deep through the water: saw Thibault leap upon the top of the dyke, and stand motionless, gazing under his hand. The next moment, Thibault cried the word of retreat, and the whole band of pioneers was in full flight towards the camp. They had no weapons but their spades and mattocks: to have remained would have meant a useless annihilation.

D'Orchimont, as he ran, was suddenly possessed with a hot, vindictive hatred against these enemies who would never let him be: who, swelling in a poisonous cloud, continually blotted out the star of his desires. Execrations bubbled to his lips, and his face set into lines of ferocity.

Although every bone and sinew plained for rest, necessity whipped him forward until he reached the door of his lodging, a mean cottage on the outskirts of Jemmingen. He staggered in like a drunken man, and leaned against the wall, panting and utterly spent.

The woman of the cottage, a dark-eyed, gentle creature, with children clinging to her tattered dress, made him lie down upon his couch of straw, brought him milk to drink, with black bread and meat. D'Orchimont ate and drank, and a measure of strength returned to him. Lying down once more, he tried to rest: watching the woman moving quietly about the dim, lime-washed chamber with the uneven stone floor; and a fancy drifted into his tired mind, that one so handsome and gentle should have been born to the estate of a gentlewoman, and gone bravely attired in pleasant idleness, instead of wearing herself away in dumb and sordid labour. Then he lay hearkening to the turmoil of the camp without, rising and falling above the children's babble; and the distant explosions of musketry. But in a little while, he could rest no longer; and girt on his sword and took his pike in hand. Bidding the woman farewell, d'Orchimont put a piece of money on the table and went out. The woman followed him to the door, talking volubly in her subdued tones: but in his abstraction he

was scarce conscious of her words: nor that she stood looking after him, with her grave brown eyes.

Threading his way through the confusion of the camp, where the Beggars were massing themselves in two great companies, d'Orchimont came once more upon the ravelin: where he espied Count Louis standing apart with The Wild-Cat. Far away to the left, a compact body of horsemen still occupied the dyke, guarding the sluice-gates, which they had closed: the air was filled with the noise of desultory firing: and all across the plain, reflected in the blue reaches of water, hung drifts of smoke. In the open spaces bodies of men advanced and retreated, or spread into units from each of which would suddenly burst a puff of smoke. D'Orchimont wondered if the Beggars' vanguard would be driven in once more, and the whole army take incontinently to flight, to perish in the river. So dire had been his late experiences, that the raw man-at-arms considered the battle-field with the resignation of a veteran. His meditations were interrupted by The Wild-Cat, who called to him by his name, and descending the bastion, led him rapidly through the camp to the village, and down to the water-side, where they were joined by Thibault. Several long, curved, flat-bottomed boats lay moored to the dyke: The

Wild-Cat, telling his followers that they were about to go upon a reconnoitring expedition, the three embarked. Thibault and d'Orchimont each bent to an oar, and their captain, standing, handled the steering oar, keeping out into the middle of the stream.

Behind the great dykes, the incessant tumult of the camp and the sounds of distant firing fell suddenly subdued: the sun smote hot upon the backs of the rowers, and glittered upon the dancing water in pulsating discs of an intolerable radiance: on either side, the shores slid past in bands of green, and brown, and gold: and as the voyagers hugged the farther bank to avoid the Spanish carabineers posted by the sluice-gates, there rose from the wastes beyond, the crying and strange speech of the crowding wild-fowl, mingled with the noise of wings as they fluttered and circled, or swept away in a level flight and swiftly vanished.

For more than two hours the scouts rowed up the river on a flowing tide, until the spire of Reyden, beyond the dyke, pierced the bright sky like a point of polished ebony. In and about Reyden village, it was supposed the Duke of Alva had posted the main body of his army; and for long The Wild-Cat hovered to and fro across the river, staring into that ominous distance, golden and hazy, of thickets, and roofs,

and ranks of motionless poplars, and vivid green fields, and blue lurking shadows, with here and there a twinkle of steel.

"And now where is the Spaniard, I pray you?" said Thibault.

"You see them not?" returned The Wild-Cat, without turning his eyes from the prospect.

"No," said Thibault.

"And you, Master Philip?" asked The Wild-Cat.

"I see nought save an outpost or two," answered d'Orchimont.

"Nor I," responded The Wild-Cat, still with that fixed gaze, his left hand gently swaying the steering oar. "And yet," he went on, after a pause, looking at his companions, "I am as certain as I am that the bright sun shines, that a great host lies ambushed yonder. The houses and the churches are stuffed with them, they lie behind stacks and dykes, they are packed in ditches, they blacken the ground like ants, could we but espy them."

"And then?" Thibault said.

"The Duke is biding his time, biding his time, as ever," answered The Wild-Cat. "See you, he bars the way to the mainland, and all behind us lies the salt sea. Unless we drive the Spaniard before us, we are shut up to destruction."

"Ay," said Thibault, casually, "so it appears. 'Tis simple, is it not?"

"I have seen the Spanish vanguard pressed nigh to destruction once and again to-day," went on The Wild-Cat, "and still the Duke sent them no aid, and still (I protest with an admirable constancy), the Blackbeards held their ground. He is but waiting until the whole Beggar army, losing patience, march forth of their entrenchments—if they will—to smite them hip and thigh. And if they will not, by God, see you, the Duke can close upon the camp when he pleases."

"'Tis very true, Captain," said Thibault, dipping his oar and watching the sparkling water run from the worn blade. "I protest you have the whole art of war at the end of your tongue. And what shall we do, then?"

"What will Louis do?" said The Wild-Cat, amending the question.

"Louis will march out to fight, what else? We know our Louis," answered Thibault.

"And why not?" observed The Wild-Cat. "What else, as you say?"

"This," returned Thibault, "that if our motley regiments know and are sure that an army lies in wait for them, Louis must go alone, unless we three walk behind him; for as God lives, the rest will never budge."

"'Tis their single chance," said The Wild-Cat. He was seated on the quarter, twisting his fingers in his great yellow beard, as his habit was: with a certain air of repression upon him: as though he held in check a force that strove within him: that looked now and again out of his eyes.

Thibault shrugged his shoulders. "Ergo, my general?" said he.

The Wild-Cat looked at his lieutenant in silence; then looked down, and his grave air deepened upon him like a shade. Despite his heavy exertions, and the hot sun, d'Orchimont felt a chill come upon him as he listened to their talk: and noting how that they accepted the situation as utterly desperate: how that they perceived clearly the vast issues involved: d'Orchimont, with a cruel pang, thought upon his private anticipations.

The tide had turned, and was running down, when The Wild-Cat gave the word to turn back. In the west, confronting the two men as they pulled at their oars, a vast curtain of purple cloud was drawn across the sky: the sun, a red globe, was sinking behind the edge: as they rowed on, it sank out of sight, and all the world was grey. The continuous roll of musketry beyond the dyke had quickened and grown louder: the dusky smoke hung in drifts and films high in the air.

Instead of landing at the place from whence they had taken the boat, The Wild-Cat directed his course farther down the river, at a point beyond the village. Leaving the boat moored to a tall post with a red-painted top, the three Master-Beggars made their way back to the camp: where The Wild-Cat went instantly to find Count Louis: while Thibault, with d'Orchimont, was getting his company together. Presently, from all about the camp rang the call of drum and trumpet: and as that eager summons struck once more upon his heart, d'Orchimont felt that his time was come; one way or the other, his fate could not fail to be decided by the issue. So great possibilities, he thought, as he fell into his place, pike in hand, to hang by a thread so slender as his life! with a million enemies clutching out of the dark to snap it in twain for ever. For long and long, it seemed to d'Orchimont, The Wild-Cat's company stood waiting under arms: at length the whole army of Master-Beggars was set in array; The Wild-Cat rode up, the word was given, and the ten thousand rebels, Flemish noble, gentleman, and peasant, German rider, Huguenot, and soldier of fortune, marched out across the causeway, past the ravelin and its battery, to give battle to the Spaniard. D'Orchimont reflected for a moment, with surprise, upon his own steadiness: and then became absorbed in the immense move-

ment about him, the exact appearance of the neck of the man marching before him, the worn brim of his looped hat, a dull stain and a crease or two upon his doublet: conscious meanwhile of the lowering cloud that mounted slowly in the west. The eternal firing in front had fallen suddenly silent. For near upon an hour the column of which d'Orchimont's company formed a part wound across the plain, now knee-deep in the waters of the inundation they themselves had caused, now marching across fields, and again wading waist-deep through canals.

Suddenly a crash of musketry burst from the distance, beyond the procession of files in front of d'Orchimont: as the bullets whined overhead, or struck to right and left, d'Orchimont felt a pause and a jarring thrill in the advance. It was as if the whole column winced. The check passed, and the mass swung forward once more, into a continuous rattle and roll of firing. Again d'Orchimont felt that singular shock; felt its vibrations increase with incredible swiftness: felt the whole gigantic body of men halt, waver for a long, deadly moment; and the next, he was carried along in a backward rush in which his weight told no more than that of a feather borne on a wave. Like a sword-thrust, the thought of defeat and disgrace went through him: then the infection of panic rose to his head: and thence-

forth he ran with his whole attention bent passionately upon the configuration of the ground, the tufts of grass, the patches of caked mud, the puddles, across which he was flying. A wave of men carried him across the first trench that defended the camp: an interval of furious running, and the same wave swept him across the second trench, and he was in the camp: when he was conscious of a clutch upon his arm, and a man running in step with him. With an execration, d'Orchimont was about to hurl the man from him, when he recognised Thibault. The look of control upon his comrade's face, in the midst of that tremendous stress, brought him somewhat to himself. At this moment, above the thunderous trampling which shook the ground, arose a horrid tumult of screams and shouting. Without abating his speed, Thibault put his mouth to d'Orchimont's ear.

"To the boat," he roared: d'Orchimont comprehended him at the third repetition; and holding together, the two charged transversely across the line of rushing men, skirted the village, and came out alone upon the dyke. Against the grey sky d'Orchimont saw the scarlet top of the post gleam like a flame. The two leaped into the boat, cut the line, and sobbing for breath, pulled out into the stream. The dyke hid them from the field of carnage, but the din of cries and

shrieks increased in volume every moment in the ears of the fugitives, although they receded swiftly from the shore.

The Duke of Alva had not taken the field in vain.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MASTER-BEGGARS' PILGRIMAGE.

Toiling desperately, Thibault and d'Orchimont had set nearly a mile of water between themselves and the fatal shores of Jemmingen, when they perceived two figures running along the top of the dyke towards the post to which the boat had been tied. The figures halted at the post, and seemed, in the dying light, to be waving frantic signals for a moment: the next, they were down at the water's edge; and tearing off their clothes, they plunged into the stream. The fugitives in the boat turned about, and pulled back across the ebbing tide, so as to pick up the two men whose black heads were drifting down stream. When they came alongside the swimmers, The Wild-Cat, streaming blood and water, heaved himself over the gunwale on one side, while Count Louis of Nassau was dragged over the other. Instantly, with scarce a word spoken, the two stark naked men laid hold of the oars: the Beggar Captain and d'Orchimont pulling stroke, Count Louis and Thibault in the bows, they laboured desperately against the tide.

The noise and shrieking of carnage, the Master-Beggars' death-cry, rang continuously across the eddying water from beyond the shadowy dykes. Through the obsession of strenuous exertion, and the fury of flight, d'Orchimont beheld the star of his desires sink behind the black dykes: and the fangs of despair met in his heart.

The darkness gathered fast beneath the sombre sky: and little by little, the horrible din grew fainter, until it sank into a feverous murmur. D'Orchimont saw the steeple of Reyden on his left hand, as they reached the place of their morning's reconnaissance, and saw it vanish into the dark: thenceforward, for hours, the dusky stream ran coiling from the oar-blades: and still the huge naked man at d'Orchimont's side, his skin gleaming in the dark, laboured with an extraordinary, indefatigable energy. D'Orchimont, rowing until every sinew ached as though he were stretched on the rack, felt at length as though his heart must burst: when The Wild-Cat, perceiving his distress, bade him to lie down in the bottom of the boat, and to keep watch for the lights of the little town of Dyler Schans. For long d'Orchimont lay gazing into the dark, sunk in the stupor of exhaustion: until at last a tiny spark glimmered far on the left bank, and as the boat rounded a corner, grew into a spangle of yellow dots, lying right ahead.

The hapless burgesses of Dyler Schans were awake and watching for the Spaniard.

"And now, brothers," said The Wild-Cat, "are we for Westphalia, all? Yonder lies the frontier-line, opposite Dyler Schans." He spoke in gasps, his voice was harsh and broken, but he continued rowing with the same indomitable vigour. "Count Louis, are you for Germany?"

"Ay," muttered Louis, huskily. "And you?"

"I follow you, Count."

"I am for Brussels, sir," said d'Orchimont. The choice had scarce presented itself to him, before his resolution was taken: and he spoke almost without volition.

"And I with you, Master Philip," said Thibault, his voice whistling in his throat. "Am I to go a-rambling among beggarly Germans on account of a parcel of Blackbeards?" he added, although he could scarce articulate his words.

"So be it," said The Wild-Cat. "Pull easy, Count." They were abreast of the town, and the boat drifted across long, tremulous reflections from the windows that opened yellow eyes upon the broad black water. "Farewell, brothers. Never doubt but God will bring us to meet again." The bow of the boat grated on the bank.

"Naked came I into the world," went on The Wild-Cat, standing up, "and naked, save for a

scanty shift of Spanish blood, I shall leave it, belike."

The next moment the two naked men had leaped ashore, and the two left in the boat watched them glimmer and vanish out of sight like ghosts. Then Thibault and d'Orchimont ferried wearily across the river, landed, and moored the boat, groping in the dark.

"We have no more use for her," said Thibault. "This accursed river runs south into Germany. We must eat and drink, and take to the road, Philip."

They stumbled along the paved street, and Thibault knocked at the door of the first house whence the light shone behind the shutters. Bars were drawn, the door opened, and a man appeared in the opening. Thibault pushed past him, closely followed by d'Orchimont. Several persons rose at the entrance of the two strangers who came out of the night, with faces like dead men.

"Salute you, good people," muttered Thibault. "Give us to eat and drink, if you would save alive the last two Master-Beggars left in Frisia."

A cry of consternation broke out about him. To d'Orchimont, dazzled by the light, and gazing mistily about him, the room appeared suddenly alive with peering faces struck into a single expression of dismay. A woman burst into a loud

sobbing: whereupon one of the men rebuked her roughly, with an oath.

They brought food and wine, and the fugitives ate and drank, standing at the table. In brief sentences, Thibault told the ill tidings: and a dreadful silence fell upon the company.

"Save yourselves ere morning light, good friends all," said Thibault. "Run, fly, sail, swim, ride—but flee away, or kill yourselves speedily. There will be roof-trees burning, and virgins ravished, and proper men hung upside-down in chains, before another dawning. The wolves have tasted blood. God recompense and save you, friends."

He turned, and the two men quitted the house. Deadly weary as they were, so that their knees gave way beneath them, they plodded onwards till the sky began to brighten: when they dropped down by the roadside and slept where they fell.

The next day began a long procession of monotonous days of hardship, of intolerable labour: of days that burned themselves out with a sky of brass and a blinding white road that stretched into infinity: of days of chill rain and wind and heavy mud: of sultry and dark days, with steaming meadows: of road and canal and village, forest and marsh, marsh and forest, and road and canal and town and sad cavalcades of emigrants crawling between the lines of wind-bent poplars.

The fugitives took what was given them, begged when charity waxed cold, and pillaged when they must: and every day's march in dust and sun, rain and mud, by road and canal and village, forest and marsh and town and trains of emigrants still crawling between the lines of wind-bent poplars, forged harder the iron of their souls. And as they travelled, the news came to them of the torture and execution of the Seigneur de Villars, the leader of Daelhem: of the execution of the two Barons of Batenburg, Maximilian Kock, Blois de Treslong, and a round dozen more of valiant patriots: and presently, of the beheading of Lamoral d'Egmont and Count Horn.

The two outlaws had no more hope: but their native spark of freedom's elemental fire smouldered still unquenched. Despair had entered into them, yet they remained stubborn. Since perish they must, they would perish fighting. The thought possessed them singly: they had no other care: and at times, when forgetfulness came like a sleep, they were almost happy.

"Why do you go to Brussels?" Thibault asked his companion, upon their first day's march.

"Because I have business in that city, as you know," returned d'Orchimont.

"I hope," said Thibault, with gravity, "the affairs of which you speak bear no correspondence to mine own. *Dieu!*" he went on, "you would

never guess it—but I go to take upon me the office and cares of a father."

D'Orchimont looked at this singular parent, intent to discover whether he spoke in earnest or in jest. Thibault screwed up his countenance.

"Dear Mother Nature is more tyrannical than our little friend the Señor Duque, do you know?" said he.

"I knew not you had a wife," said d'Orchimont.

"A wife!" cried Thibault. "What! Would you have me to marry Maria Desirotte? Maria the singer of songs, pretty and gay, light as the sea-foam, and jealous as a Barbary parrot? One should cultivate a sense of proportion in this life, Philip. A mistress, yea, a very pearl among mistresses; but a wife for little Thibault, O no, never."

"Your moralities differ somewhat from mine, it appears," remarked d'Orchimont.

"As ripe wisdom differeth from green," retorted Thibault. "The monastery shell still sticketh among your new-fledged plumage, dear child. Would you, in truth, marry a wife in such days as these, when no man's neck is worth a groat? Would you chain a delicate woman to a rambling Beggar o' the woods? More—would you clog yourself with so fragile a burthen?"

"And yet," said d'Orchimont, "I do not see

that you better the situation by avoiding the sacrament."

"Go to! shall woman be deprived of her peculiar glory, and man become emasculate, shall God's law be set aside, because the Duke of Alva chances to be playing with a tyrant's sceptre?" returned Thibault, with some appearance of indignation: and d'Orchimont found no reply to the Master-Beggar's sophisms, sure as he was that there existed a sufficient answer.

"Pardon me, comrade," continued Thibault, "but is not that a love-gage on your finger?"

"You are too shrewd for this world, as God hath planned it," retorted d'Orchimont. "The ring was given me by a Bishop." He slipped it from his finger and handed it to Thibault.

"Never a whit the less for that the bauble might have been a love-gage once," said Thibault, scrutinising the engraved bezel. "The coat-armour of dear old Liége, as I live. Your Bishop is so happy and fortunate among men. He cannot marry if he would. This little hoop, now—perhaps a Countess wore it once, long ago, before—let us say—ay, before little Mistress Jacqueline opened her pretty eyes upon this naughty world."

These ribald speculations so corresponded with certain wordless misgivings that lurked in d'Or-

chimont's own mind, that his anger kindled instantly.

"Let me counsel you to set limits to your scandalous tongue, or by the Holy Trinity, I will cut it out," said he.

"O' my word," said Thibault, staring, "I meant no harm. God forbid I should blame the good prelate. Liége gave you this ring, say you? Tell me how it was, brother."

D'Orchimont's anger was extinguished as swiftly as it had kindled. He related briefly in what manner he had come into possession of the token.

"And now," said Thibault, when the story was done, "if I keep this trinket instead of yourself, it may be you will be the better served. If you are taken, I may chance to escape, and may gain you help by means of this token. What think you? Wilt lend it me?"

D'Orchimont hesitated: not because he distrusted that whimsical, fiery, warped, but sincere admixture called Thibault, but because to part with the ring was to cut a link in the slight chain of sentimental circumstance that bound him to Jacqueline de Mirlamont.

"Ay, keep it, if you will," he said. "And what can I do for you, if you are taken and I am left?"

"Be good, if you can find means, to my poor

maid," said Thibault. "And to little Thibault the Second," he added, with a singular, blank expression.

"I will," returned the other, heartily.

"Why then, our affairs are made up, and let Fortune strike her foulest," cried Thibault; and they rose up from the wayside, where they had been sitting, and betook them to their journey.

During that interminable march, d'Orchimont lost all reckoning of time: save that the Sunday was marked by the celebration of mass in the villages through which the two fugitives passed. Three such occasions, when he had listened to the familiar jangle of the sacring bell, were lodged in his memory: when one evening they entered the city of Louvain, so weary and famished that they neglected all customary precaution, and walked directly into the first tavern they found.

The bare chamber, smokily lighted, was filled with a company of men-at-arms in crimson jerkins, sitting about the wooden tables with liquor in front of them, and talking noisily.

"This is no place for us," muttered Thibault, "but 'tis too late to go back," and the two sat down in the corner by the door: where they were served with bread and meat, and a tall stone bottle of Schiedam. Some of the soldiers looked round: but seeing nothing to arouse their curiosity in a couple of unkempt and dusty men

dressed in rustic attire, they resumed their talk. But the Sergeant of the party, a thick-set, hard-faced man wearing a baldric of yellow silk, regarded them attentively for a moment out of his deep-set eyes: and presently he rose, and came and sat down beside the table at which Thibault and d'Orchimont were supping.

"Give you good-even, friends," said the Sergeant. "You have come from far, have you not?"

"O, from far enough. Ay, and too far," returned Thibault.

"From Frisia, perchance," hinted the narrow-eyed Sergeant.

"You have hit it," said Thibault, "to a marvel."

D'Orchimont glanced at his companion, and perceived, to his alarm, that Thibault's reckless humour was fast rising.

"I must ask you four questions, friends," said the Sergeant. "What are your names, whence do you come, whither do you go, and upon what business?"

Thibault checked the queries on his fingers: pausing at the last, he put the tips of his fingers together, and leaning his elbows on the table, stared impudently at the soldier.

"Softly, friend," said he. "Fair and softly. I never saw a man so eaten up with curiosity. I

pity you, Sergeant Œdipus. O' my word, I do pity you."

D'Orchimont made up his mind for the worst. The Sergeant's face darkened and drew tense.

"Sirrah, you shall answer me, or, by the living God, I shall lay you in irons;" and the Sergeant's men-at-arms all turned at the sound of his formidable outcry.

Thibault, with much deliberation, filled his companion's glass and his own, and still grasping the bottle, lifted his glass with his left hand and drank, before replying.

"*Dame!* Are you to ask all the riddles in the world, while I rack my brains to find answers? Why should I play Sphinx to your Œdipus? Come, Sergeant, who gave you authority to plague poor travellers thus?"

"Hast never seen this cognizance?"

The Sergeant, who had risen to his feet, tapped the breast of his jerkin, upon which was embroidered the badge of the Duke of Aerschot.

"Very often," retorted Thibault, loudly. "And never twice under the same flag."

The other went a dusky red, and an ominous murmur arose from the men-at-arms, some of whom rose up and gathered about their Sergeant; for the vacillations of the turncoat Duke of Aerschot were too notorious to bear jesting upon.

"Did I not say I pitied you, dear Sergeant

Œdipus?" continued Thibault, speaking very rapidly. "And why? Because your impudent curiosity will never be sated in this world."

He struck at him with all his force at the last word, with the stone Schiedam bottle: the big man's skull broke as an egg breaks, and he sprawled in a heap, without a sound.

The next moment Thibault had cleared the table and the dead body with a flying leap, burst through the circle of clutching men as a swimmer cleaves a wave, and ran out of the door. D'Orchimont, in act to follow, was seized and flung upon his back, with a knee on his chest and hands at his throat, and the glitter of a knife in his eyes.

"Have a care," he cried, choking. "I am in the service of the Lord Bishop of Liége. What make you? Have a care."

They took their hands from his neck at the words: for maltreatment of the servants of Holy Church was a dangerous pastime.

"I warn you, harm me not, or you shall fall under the Inquisition. Let me go free."

"Not this time," said the burly soldier who knelt on d'Orchimont's chest. "Tie up the dog, and hale him along, some of you."

They flung him on his face, bound his wrists with a leathern belt, and dragged him to his feet: and with a man-at-arms, naked poniard in hand,

on either side of him, and one behind, d'Orchimont was hurried at a cruel pace through the black, foul streets and up a winding causeway that ascended a steep hill, until the bulk of a great building gloomed above them: a gleam of torchlight shone beneath an archway, where they were greeted by dusky figures with glinting halberds: and the officer on duty issuing from the shadows, immediately consigned the prisoner to a stone cell, with a filthy truss of straw in the corner.

The door clanged, the lock shot into its place, and d'Orchimont was left alone. They had unbound his hands, and he flung himself upon the straw: conscious of little save indignation with the harebrained desperado, Thibault: whose last freak had brought him into this prison. But the Duke of Aerschot, thought d'Orchimont, desirous as he was to offend no party, would scarce refuse to let him go: and upon this comfortable reflection, hardened now to toil and blood, violence and vicissitude, he drowsed asleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

A JEW OF ARRAGON.

Two days after Thibault's deadly performance with the stone Schiedam bottle — an exploit which would have pleased him mightily, had he not thereby lost his friend—Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova was returning to his lodging in Brussels by way of the street that rises steeply to the Cathedral of Saint Gudule; when he was aware of a peasant leaning upon the parapet of the terrace which surrounds the church, and looking down upon him. Something familiar in the figure, outlined black against the sunshine, caught the Spaniard's attention, and he looked again, pulling his hat-brim over his eyes. The rustic bared his head and saluted: and so soon as Don Miguel perceived that sharp, rat-like profile, he knew his man.

"Give you good-day, Dom Thibault," said he.

"God be with you, Señor," returned Thibault. "And since He hath brought us to meet again, will you grant me the favour of a privy word with you, Señor?"

"Willingly," said Don Miguel: who, since

his duel on the bridge of the iron crucifix at Durbuy, had often recalled his whilom adversary, and the other masquerading friar, Dom Hilarion.

Thibault swung himself over the parapet, dropping at the Spaniard's side, and they walked on together through the busy, sparkling streets of the city, which lay all parcelled into zones of hot brightness and blue shadow, baking in the midsummer sun. The Master-Beggar was perfectly aware that he was giving his life into the hands of this Spanish noble: but, although he scarce paused to weigh chances when the occasion presented a ready means to his end, he remembered the duel, and how the honour of this gentleman had rung true at a moment highly critical.

"Señor," began Thibault, at once, "when last we met, I remember that Mistress Jacqueline de Mirlamont, the Countess of Durbuy, was so fortunate as to find a protector in Señor Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova: and hence it is that I have begged this favour of you. For I bear a message to the Countess. Behold my credentials." He took out the Bishop's ring, and held it towards the Spaniard. "Know you where the Countess may be found, Señor?"

"Prithee, sir, whose insignia are these?" asked Don Miguel, peering at the ring. "The

coat-armour of your countrymen is strange to me."

"'Tis the cognizance of my lord Bishop of Liége," said Thibault.

"You bear a charge from the Bishop, then?"

"So it appears, Señor," Thibault answered.

They walked some paces in silence.

"Pardon me, Señor," said Thibault—"this street bears so delightful an aspect that I swear I take a marvellous pleasure simply to walk a-down it: but an if it conducts me not towards Madam the Countess, *Dame!* I would sooner go a-rambling in the dismal labyrinths of hell: saving for the privilege of your company, Señor."

Don Miguel stopped and regarded Thibault. The townsfolk, passing to and fro, cast curious glances upon the pair: wondering to behold a great gentleman of Spain, in ruff and silken doublet and yellow boots, talking in the open street with a little dusty rag of a peasant.

"Sir," said Don Miguel, "will you confide this message which so burns in your breast, to me?"

Thibault screwed up his face and spread his hands under the other's grave scrutiny.

"Señor Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova, you have but to raise your voice, and I, Thibault, am no better than a dead man. Do you think

I am out of love with my life, as I walk beside you, Señor, unarmed, and saying naught? But I crave leave to remind you, Señor, that what you ask of me is not mine to give."

The Spaniard began to walk slowly forward once more. "Sir," he said, "if I grant your request, I would beg your leave to bear you company into the presence of Madam the Countess my friend."

"I shall be vastly honoured, Señor," responded Thibault, cheerfully.

The two went forward in silence, until they came to the door of the great house, from the window of which Jacqueline de Mirlamont had watched her friend cross the deserted street, on a day some nine weeks since, when the bell of Saint Gudule was tolling.

Don Miguel, with a word of excuse, left his companion in the vestibule, while he went in to the Countess. Totally disregarding the porter, a square, white-bearded soldado in the Duke of Alva's livery, who was eyeing him with much suspicion, Thibault leaned against the stone column of the porch, folded his arms, and gazed out upon the sunshine, whistling between his teeth the air of a Beggar song. Now that he was come to the end of his horrible journey; now that he found himself engaged neck-deep in perilous intrigue once more: in which the wel-

fare of his mistress, and his friend's life, were set in one scale of Fortune's balance, against the life of little Thibault, which he had flung into the other, the Master-Beggar discovered a delightful sense of renewal, of exhilaration. He, Thibault, of whom he had ever a golden opinion, should help to outwit the Señor Duque, in spite of all his armies and engines of tyranny; and although the Governor-General might never know it.

Returning, Don Miguel brought the Master-Beggar into an upper chamber, where was Jacqueline de Mirlamont, alone. Why, thought Thibault, looking at her as she greeted him, I left this pretty wench a girl, upon the bridge at Durbuy some three months agone, and in Brussels I find a woman, and an anxious woman—and that is so much the better for Master Philip.

"Señor Don Miguel has told me you have somewhat to say to me, sir," said Jacqueline. "Pray you be seated."

"Know you this ring, Madam," said Thibault, kneeling on one knee and presenting the Bishop's token.

Jacqueline's face changed swiftly into a still, wide-eyed look of dreadful anticipation. She took the ring in silence, glanced at it, and fixed her gaze once more on Thibault.

"Master Philip d'Orchimont, from whom I had the ring," cried the Beggar, hastily, "is

safe and well, I do verily believe. I left him but two days since:" and he forthwith recounted the story of the adventure in the tavern at Louvain.

"So!" said the Countess. "If I understand you aright, sir, you abandoned your comrade to this crew of ruffians."

Had she stabbed him with a dagger, the blood would have risen no more swiftly. Burned saddle-colour by the sun, Thibault's dark face blackened: and he bowed in silence.

"Give me leave, Countess," interposed Don Miguel. "I think you scarce do justice to this gentleman. Had M. Thibault gone back to M. d'Orchimont, he would have jeopardied his life no less—for aught that M. Thibault knew—than he hath done in seeking you out thus. Had M. Thibault followed the impulse of his heart, and returned to his friend, I will wager that the pair of unfortunate gentlemen would have been hanged to the ceiling-rafters before they could repeat a *Miserere*."

"Madam the Countess of Durbuy would doubtless have preferred that posture of affairs," said Thibault. He stood near the door, sulky as a schoolboy corrected.

"I am greatly beholden to M. Thibault," said Jacqueline, with a very clouded demeanour.

Thibault turned to the Spaniard. "Señor,"

he said, abruptly, "I came here to obtain what succour I might for my friend. Can you give me any assurance that I might not as well have tossed this ring he gave me into the sea?"

"The faith of a gentleman, who will do all that he may to help one who is honoured by the regard of Madam the Countess of Durbuy," returned the Spaniard, with his accustomed stately gravity.

"Señor Don Miguel, I kiss your hands and feet," said the Beggar, rapidly. "Madam," he went on, turning again to the Countess, "Madam, whether you know it or not, whether you care or not (*Dame! I* care not), I have done you the best service of your life. Give me a recompense that shall cost you nothing. Send a lacquey to shew me the lodgings of Mistress Maria Desirotte, your waiting-woman."

"She is ill——" began Jacqueline, and paused. Indignation mingled with another, and indefinable, emotion were in her face as she regarded the Master-Beggar. "O——" she said, and stopped again.

Thibault bowed with an ironical gesture.

"Madam," said he, with a disagreeable, smiling twist of his countenance, "you are perfectly right in your ingenious surmise."

The Countess bit her lip, and turned her back upon him: shot a glance of interrogation at

Don Miguel: and taking a silver hand-bell from the table, she rang it twice or thrice.

In a few moments an elderly tire-woman entered. The Countess spoke to her in a low voice: then turned to the Master-Beggar.

"Sir," she said, "if it please you to follow my servant, she will carry you whither you desire."

"Madam, I thank you. Farewell. Señor, farewell. Do not forget little Thibault, for, by God's wounds, he will ever hold Señor Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova dear in his remembrance. Farewell."

The door closed behind the Master-Beggar: and Jacqueline turned to the Spaniard, with a pitiful look. Tears stood in her eyes, and her lip quivered. Don Miguel led her to a great chair.

"Courage, Madam," said he. "Never heed this waspish little conspirator. We have other affairs to mind. I will go write to the Duke of Aerschot, with whom I have some slight acquaintance, and despatch the scroll by a swift rider. I think no harm can befall M. d'Orchimont in the meantime."

They talked for awhile, discussing the affair in all its bearings with the freedom of two friends who perfectly understood the position of each towards the other; and the Spaniard took his leave. Three days later he returned, with a letter from the Duke of Aerschot in his hand:

wherein the Duke expressed his fervent desire to pleasure his illustrious and dear friend, Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova, in the matter of which Don Miguel had written with so kind an eloquence: but added, that in the interests of the State, he had felt himself compelled to lay the case of M. Philip d'Orchimont, now under surveillance in his Castle of The Four Sons of Aymon at Louvain, before the Council of Troubles: which august tribunal would doubtless, in due season, render that impartial justice towards the said M. Philip d'Orchimont, for which they were notorious. And in the meanwhile, let Don Miguel assure himself that M. d'Orchimont's captivity should be lightened to him in so far as the hard conditions of these sad times permitted.

"Thus far, then, M. Philip is safer than if he roamed the country, or remained in hiding," said Don Miguel. "And for the rest, Countess, I think the time has come to seek the help of Don Gabriel de Campuzano Aguilera."

Although Jacqueline had never yet seen this Jew, the friend of Don Miguel, she had permitted the Spaniard to inform Don Gabriel of her affairs: and subsequently, whether owing to the subtle machinations of this singular person, or to some other cause, the Countess had lived in comparative peace: for the attentions of her

wooer, Don Rafael de Castañeda, had suddenly slackened: and of late, he had gone to the wars in the train of his noble kinsman, the Governor-General.

And now that Philip d'Orchimont, towards whom her thoughts went out by day and night: and whom, since the tidings of the great defeat of Jemmingen had reached Brussels, she beheld ever before her inward vision, lying wounded and deserted on a dark field of carnage: now that he was found alive, yet enmeshed in the toils of the Blood-Council, Jacqueline turned to the mysterious Jew of Arragon as to the Messiah.

But at this time Don Gabriel de Campuzano Aguilera was absent from Brussels: and day after day, for thirty days, Jacqueline suffered the gnawing of suspense: until her food turned to ashes in her mouth: the sunlight mocked her: and she learned to fear the approach of night. For although the dust might accumulate for months upon the indictments lying before the Council of Troubles, these formidable Inquisitors, if the mood were upon them, would sometimes sign hundreds of execution-warrants in a day: to be countersigned by Alva with a corresponding celerity. For the Duke's methods of administering justice approached the Oriental in their peremptory finality.

At length, after dusk one evening, when Jacqueline sat alone in her chamber, the lacquey announced the arrival of Don Miguel. The Spaniard entered the room followed by a tall man in a black robe: and presented Señor Don Gabriel de Campuzano Aguilera to the Countess.

Jacqueline beheld the form and countenance of a noble old man, with fine white locks and beard, and eyes of a singular brilliancy looking out of a thin, aquiline face of a waxen paleness.

"My daughter, I have heard your story: and I am come to be of service to you, if it be possible," said the Jew. His voice rang firm and mellow, with a certain silken quality in its tones.

"Señor, I am infinitely beholden to you," said Jacqueline, meeting the old man's gentle, vivid gaze, unabashed. "You know what I would have—the freedom of a certain unfortunate gentleman. I have estates, Señor, in my own power: if they may serve——"

Don Miguel rose, and passed into the antechamber, the door of which he secured, and returning, closed the door and sat down. During the little interval, Jacqueline looked curiously at Don Gabriel, and discovered an intuition of the subtle force that dwelt in that refined, venerable figure, with the youthful eyes.

"My daughter," said the Jew, "I know of

your estates, and of their worth. Now, I pray you to remember, Countess, before we enter into this matter, that one of my nation doth never intermeddle in any affair for naught. Think not, therefore, that I would lay a burden of irksome gratitude upon you. Think rather," he continued, lifting his hand, as he saw Jacqueline about to speak, "think rather, that Gabriel the Jew would line his pockets, albeit in just payment for service done—if indeed such service may be accomplished. And since we have but little time to spend, give me leave to place before you that which I have planned."

Don Gabriel went on to unfold, piece by piece, very simply and clearly, the scheme in the working out of which he hoped to attain freedom for both the Countess of Durbuy and Master Philip d'Orchimont. Upon the security of her estates, and at a certain rate of interest, the Jew would place a sum of money to the credit of Jacqueline de Mirlamont: such sum to be expended by him in nothing less than bribery.

"There is but one thing these gentlemen of the Council love better than the shedding of Flemish blood," said Don Gabriel, "and that is the wrongful acquisition of Flemish gold. There will be delay, Countess, I forewarn you, and hope still deferred: but be not disquieted. The life of this gallant gentleman shall be held secure

meanwhile: sithence the Inquisitors cannot gain, but must lose, should aught befall him."

Midnight was striking when the discussion and arrangement of details were concluded: and the Jew rose up to take his leave.

"God keep you, my daughter," said he; and his smooth voice modulated suddenly to a tone of extraordinary kindness. "I beseech you once more, take courage. Hearken, my daughter," he went on, "I am an old man: there are few corners of the world I have not visited: I have known a multitude of men, in many countries, and beheld many secret and strange things: and of all experience this is the sum: that the will and purpose of God burns like a thread of lightning throughout this coil and welter of circumstance, silent, indestructible, eternal. Through happiness and torture, long life or untimely death, despite the malice of kings, the fires of tyranny, cleaveth the sword of the Lord. The testimony is sure, my daughter: look within your heart; and you shall read there, the courage of God."

He turned, and left the chamber: Don Miguel followed him; and presently returned.

"Señor, since our Lord was crucified, I had not thought there lived a noble Jew," said Jacqueline. Her eyes shone; and she spoke as one moved out of herself. "He talks of money,"

she cried. "But how can I recompense this man?"

"Madam," answered the Spaniard, "if you talk of recompense . . . I think that you and I are pawns in a game of chess: wherein Don Gabriel sits on one side of the board, and the kings and princes of the world are gathered about the other."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FOUR SONS OF AYMON.

The sun, rising upon the tranquil plain, struck it into a vivid medley of confused brightness and long shadows: transformed into rough gold the great walls of the fortress called The Four Sons of Aymon; and rising higher, shot a golden arrow into the bare chamber where a prisoner lay sleeping. Still ascending, the strong sun beat upon a prisoner loitering on the ramparts, or pacing to and fro, into the shadow of the watch-tower and out again: until the shadow dwindled, and lengthened again, across another tract of pavement: and the level rays lit redly upon the prisoner's face as he gazed into the country of the sunset; and faded, as the sun's globe sank behind the purple rim of low hills on the confines of the darkening landscape. So, day after day, save when battalions of cloud sailed in a moving dome above the circular disk of country. The river, coiling about the rocky bastions upon which The Four strong Sons of Aymon stood so firmly, far below the weary-eyed prisoner peering over the battlements, mirrored

the green foliage that clustered about their massive feet; reflected, in its flowing glass, so changeless yet so mutable, the hues of autumn; received the dying leaves, and carried them swiftly out of sight. The prisoner, looking down upon the grey water eddying and flowing, flowing; knew that the stream sucked out and swept away from him, grain by grain, day after day, the substance of his life. Time insatiable and flowing water, gradually and surely, stole and carried into the waste unknown that which would never return. The minutes, barren and dead, glided away like the sere leaves.

Gazing into the country of the sunset, towards vast lagoons of light and dim cities and mountains, d'Orchimont beheld the wraith of himself when time and the river should have worked their will upon him, toiling, thin as air, utterly futile and bereft, along the wan roads winding across the dark plain, towards the gorgeous lands where dwell the unseen nations of the dead.

The bare plain stared into the pallid sky: and winter came and passed: and touched, in passing, the prisoner's head, leaving a print of white fingers: and the plain blossomed green with the wistful coming of the spring: and burned once more in the sultry noons of summer. Again the leaves fell into the river, and were carried

away, beneath the watching eyes of the prisoner: and another winter passed, and another spring came softly, and lengthened into summer; and still the prisoner, bearded and lean, loitered on the ramparts: and stared across the fields towards the place where a tiny phantom of cloud hung low in the sky, above the city of Brussels. By this time the white finger-prints were very plain to see: and the flowing river was hateful as a vampire to the prisoner.

And meanwhile, tidings of the unending duel between the Duke of Alva and the Prince of Orange, the champion of the Netherlands, came from time to time to The Four Sons of Aymon: and within the first few weeks of his captivity, d'Orchimont heard of the Prince's advance at the head of thirty thousand men. For several days the rebel host and the Governor-General's army lay within cannon-shot of each other, and scarce three leagues from Louvain: when the Duke, the master strategist of his age, forced the Prince to retreat, step by step, southward into the Ardennes. Presently came tidings that the Bishop of Liége had refused passage to the Netherland army: and how William of Orange had crossed the frontier into France: and after a long time, the certain intelligence that his whole army was dispersed: of the Duke's return to the capital, and of his triumphal festivities

there. Followed, rumours of negotiations between the Prince of Orange and the French Court, between the Duke of Alva and Queen Elizabeth of England, between King Philip of Spain and the Emperor Maximilian: and meanwhile, the fires of persecution, burning fiercer, still consumed the land. Then came reports of the Governor-General's new taxations of the Tenth and Twentieth Penny: of the provinces' stubborn resistance: and, in the summer of 1570, of the general Amnesty sent by King Philip the Spoiler, and proclaimed at Antwerp. But despite the Amnesty, the pursuit and destruction of heretics continued with zeal unabated: and still the prisoner sauntered drearily about and about the precincts of The Four Sons of Aymon.

And still, despite the implacable suspense that weighed upon him day and night, despite the triumphs of his country's tyrant, the great Duke, despite the unseen death drawing nearer and nearer, which might leap out of the dark upon him at any moment, d'Orchimont never bowed his neck to destiny. The memories of Jacqueline de Mirlamont, and of the bright, plangent scenes of adventure wherein he had striven, with unavailing desperation, to attain the star of his desires, were set far behind him, across a wide and dark waste. Now and again he looked

back: and like a tiny silver city, illumined by a solitary shaft of sunshine falling athwart the brooding desolation, he beheld, for a moment of anguish, that microcosm of exquisite remembrance.

The second summer of his captivity had ripened into autumn, when the prisoner, for three mornings in succession, was awakened by a great light of sunrise that crimsoned all his cell: and rising, he would mount to the ramparts and behold the whole eastern sky rolling fiery waves to the zenith. On the fourth day, a gale arose from the north-west; and now swelling, and now falling, but always increasing in violence after every lull, for days and nights the great wind, rushing salt from the sea, vehemently assaulted the strong Sons of Aymon, and cried and shrieked about their unshaken walls. The prisoner, excited to an agony of restlessness by the unceasing, remorseless tumult and violence of the air, wandered miserably from place to place. His sleep went from him: he lost desire for food; and was taken with a bitter loathing of his life; so that again and again he would go to the battlement, and look down upon the grey river all flawed and beaten by the wind, with a sick longing; and again would deny himself, and return to his aimless walking to and fro, and up and down.

Upon one such occasion, d'Orchimont noted idly the tiny black figure of a rider, out on the Brussels road beyond the clustered houses of Louvain. The horseman, whoever he might be, was in a desperate hurry: stooping on his horse's neck, his cloak tailing out behind, he was driving his steed at full stretch into the teeth of the wind that tore and buffeted horse and rider.

Presently d'Orchimont turned to descend into the interior of the Castle: when he was aware of footsteps approaching down the stone corridor: and wearily glad to welcome any break in his tedium, the prisoner stood at the head of the stairway that led into the corridor, and waited.

"Here is M. d'Orchimont, Señor," said the Major-Domo's voice: and a tall gentleman came up the steps into the stormy daylight. His hat was bound about his ears with a black scarf, he was streaked with mud from ankle to shoulder, and the rowels of his spurs were red.

"M. Philip d'Orchimont," said the stranger, taking a sealed parchment from his doublet, "I have the honour to bring you this paper."

D'Orchimont took the packet, looked at it vacantly, looked up at the darkly flushed face and the shining eyes of the messenger, and looked down again, like a man striving to recall something.

"M. d'Orchimont," said the stranger, observ-

ing him with a grave, compassionate gaze, "I have the very great pleasure to inform you that within that cover is a writing of free pardon from the Council of Troubles."

D'Orchimont looked attentively at the other while he was speaking, then glanced again at his parchment, and laid it aside upon the stone balustrade.

"M. d'Orchimont, you are free. A horse awaits you at the gate."

The stranger saw the singular, frozen expression on the prisoner's countenance gradually break up; saw the blood rush to his face; saw his teeth clench and his eyes lighten.

"Señor," said d'Orchimont, his hand closing on his parchment, "I . . ." he stopped and put his hand to his throat, "I am infinitely beholden to you. I think, Señor, we have met before," he added, staring at the Spaniard.

Don Miguel lifted his hand with a gesture of warning.

"Will it please you, M. d'Orchimont, to accompany me from the Castle?" he said.

Within half-an-hour d'Orchimont heard the rattle of the chains as the drawbridge was raised behind him: felt the air about him blowing free: and climbed stiffly into his saddle.

The two men rode slowly down the winding causeway towards the town: d'Orchimont with

a curious fearful consciousness upon him: as though he had awakened from sleep to find himself before the world riding nude as Lady Godiva.

At the feet of The Four Sons of Aymon, the Spaniard was about to turn down the street leading into the heart of the town: when d'Orchimont suddenly drew rein.

"Not into the city—not through the streets, Señor," he pleaded shamefacedly. "Is there no way about, in the country?"

With a courteous word, the Spaniard instantly fell in with his suggestion: and the two rode swiftly beyond the houses; (d'Orchimont with difficulty repressing an impulse to clutch at the pommel of his saddle), made a circuit; and came out upon the open country.

The great wind roared joyfully in d'Orchimont's ears; and a prodigious, heady exultation rose within him as he galloped beside his deliverer, Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova.

CHAPTER XIX.

BROKEN LOOSE.

After an hour's swift riding, d'Orchimont and the Spaniard came in sight of two horsemen who were halted at a cross-roads, beside a crucifix: and as he drew nearer, d'Orchimont recognised, in the bearded figures dressed in the high-boots and frieze coats of cattle-drovers, Thibault and The Wild-Cat. The two Master-Beggars, spurring their horses one on either side of their comrade, each held out a hand to him: the rushing wind carried away their words of greeting: and the four dropped into single file, and rode onwards at a steady, unchanging pace.

Enfeebled by captivity, broken with sudden, overmastering emotion, and divining that some grave emergency was toward, d'Orchimont gave his whole attention to his horsemanship: while his companions rode beside him with the concentration of men pursued. The sun, a spot of misty brightness, sank behind a diaphanous veil of grey, across which clots of vapour were sailing like puffs of smoke; until the twilight gathered, and the spindrift swept across the darkening

fields. The night had fallen when the fugitives halted at a wayside alehouse to bait their horses and to sup. While they ate and drank, Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova told d'Orchimont, in brief, of the means taken to obtain his release; of the interminable delays which had ensued: and of the incredible difficulties that must be overcome before his friend—whom he did not name—secured the signature of Juan de Vargas (after the Duke, the chief upon the Blood-Council) to the pardon of the prisoner held captive by The Four Sons of Aymon. Meanwhile, this mighty and secret friend of Don Miguel's had stolen away the Countess of Durbuy and transported her to the Castle of Lowestein, which stands upon the Island of Bommel, where the Meuse and Vaal rivers run into the sea. Thither, if M. d'Orchimont pleased, said Don Miguel, they were bound: since neither his life, nor that of the Countess, were safe in the Netherlands: and Lowestein was an excellent point of escape: moreover, the Spaniard's secret ally had a certain hold upon the Castellan, M. Tisnacq.

"And yourself, Señor?" asked d'Orchimont, presently.

"I ride with you, by your good leave," answered the Spaniard. "For I had the honour, M. d'Orchimont, to engage myself with the

Countess of Durbuy, to compass your deliverance, were it possible. And until I shall bring you to meet, my task is still to accomplish. Moreover, M. d'Orchimont, I myself am outlawed: my life is forfeit as an heretic: indeed, 'tis endangered on more sides than the Roman. And since I must take to flight, M. d'Orchimont," added Don Miguel, politely, "I count myself most fortunate to find such company on this perilous road."

The Wild-Cat, taking up the tale, related how that Thibault and himself had followed the Prince of Orange throughout his disastrous campaign: how that after his army had fallen to pieces, they had travelled into Spain, about a certain affair: how that they had returned in disguise to Brussels: where, learning from Don Miguel that his friend's secret intrigues for d'Orchimont's release were still undetermined, they had wandered at large once more, about business of their own: always, however, keeping in communication with Don Miguel: until, hearing that d'Orchimont was at last to be delivered, the two Master-Beggars had arranged with the Spaniard that he should bring their comrade to a certain place of meeting.

After some four hours' rest, the three Master-Beggars and the Spaniard set forth once more. The wind thundered in the black hollow of the

heavens, blowing with so great a force that they could scarce make way against it; with sweeping squalls of rain that blotted out every dim indication of the road. Riding knee to knee, the four pressed onwards: until the wan light of dawning began to filter through the vast and ragged masses of driving cloud, gleaming faintly upon the pallid country; and the travellers halted to consult upon the road they must follow.

They were huddled together with their backs to the gale, which so whistled past their ears and cried above them, that each man must shout at the pitch of his voice to his fellow, with his hand to his mouth, when they were fearfully aware of a new element mingled with the barbarous tumult of wind; a sullen, distant thunder that grew momently louder. The sweating and streaming horses trembled and laid back their ears, and the fugitives turned and looked behind them.

Between the wild landscape and the low vault of wrathful sky, a foaming wall of brown water was rushing towards them with a horrible swiftness. The next moment four desperate men stooped on their horses' necks, were spurring for their lives towards a bare and rounded eminence that rose about a mile distant. They had scarce gained the summit, when the sour smell of the flood smote upon their nostrils, and the roaring

of the waters filled their ears: and glancing back, they beheld a seething stream that spread far and wide, hurling along with it trees and masses of woodwork and haystacks and dark bodies.

"The dykes are burst," cried The Wild-Cat. "There will be such a flood as hath not been since the Zuyder-Zee was made. We must ride south and west, and fetch a wide compass. . . . Shall the blind sea stop us?"

He struck spurs into his foam-flecked horse, and the four rode on again in a direction at an obtuse angle to the course of the flood, making a wide circuit.

In every village through which the travellers passed that day, the terrified inhabitants were getting their goods into boats, knocking rafts together in hot haste, and making what forlorn preparations they might for a disastrous inundation. All that day and night, and the day following, the storm blew with unabated vehemence: the sea broke through the dykes along the coasts of North Holland: and (as one may read in the chronicles) the greatest flood burst upon the country which had befallen for three hundred years.

But the four fugitives, escaping from the outskirts of the inundation, arrived in safety, upon the third evening of their flight, at the little

town of Ruremonde on the Meuse, some eighty miles inland. Here they sold their horses, purchased a boat, and set sail down the Meuse. Upon the afternoon of the second day after their departure from Ruremonde, d'Orchimont, sitting at the tiller beside the Spaniard, gazing across the dusky flats, beheld the turrets of Lowestein rising black upon an orange rift in the gloomy sky. The Wild-Cat and Thibault lay in the bows of the boat, half-hidden by the broad red lug-sail, scanning the country about them and talking in low tones.

D'Orchimont surveyed the dark range of great buildings towering upon the island, with a singular quietude of spirit. He had no plan: were the Master-Beggars to gain an entrance into the Castle, he knew not what they should do there. But Philip d'Orchimont was going to Jacqueline de Mirlamont, who awaited him: the thought possessed him singly: and his whole man was welded into a massive resolution. He was drawing nearer and nearer to the star of his desires: and the doubt that aught in heaven or earth could stop him now, never at all presented itself to the mind of d'Orchimont. For the rest, he had The Wild-Cat and Thibault at his side, and this Spanish gentleman who had shown him so great a friendship.

The four landed upon the Island of Bommel,

at a place within cannon-shot of the castle, and concealed the boat in a little creek.

The same evening, at sunset, four Mendicant friars came to the landward entrance of the Castle of Lowestein, and prayed a night's lodging. In accordance with universal custom, the halberdmen on duty at the gate admitted the monks without parley: and a man-at-arms walked before them to conduct them straightway into the Castle hall. Within the fortalice, a double fosse encircled the donjon. As they crossed the first drawbridge, d'Orchimont, who walked beside Thibault, clutched him by the arm, and pointed downwards. The planks were silvered with frost: and upon the edge of the bridge, three black and tiny bodies with eyes of rubies were sitting upright. With a shudder d'Orchimont recognised that portent of disaster, the three witch-toads: and for once in his life, Thibault looked and said no word; for his tongue dried in his mouth.

The hall was lighted only by the glow of the logs that blazed in the wide chimney: and as they entered, the four friars perceived a stout, square-headed man standing by the fire, talking with a grey-haired matron wearing a ruff.

The man-at-arms had began to speak, when The Wild-Cat stepped swiftly forward, and stood in front of the Castellan.

"M. Tisnacq," he cried, "I would ask you, for whom do you hold this Castle? For the King of Spain? or the noble Prince of Orange?"

The voice of The Wild-Cat rang about the walls, and there was a moment's silence as the Castellan stared at the stranger monk.

"And who are you, sir monk?" said the Castellan, in thick tones. "What make you here, mad friar, with your brawling questions? The Prince of Orange! Let me tell you, sirrah, I know of no Prince, save the noble Prince Philip of Spain."

There was a shattering explosion, as The Wild-Cat fired a pistol full into Tisnacq's face. The Castellan tumbled prone upon the hearth, and lay still. There was a moment's pause, and the sharp hiss of steel as The Wild-Cat and Thibault drew their swords. With a pitiable outcry, like that of a wounded animal, the Castellan's wife kneeled down beside her dead husband. The soldier who had brought the monks into the hall stood staring in his place beside Don Miguel, who had not stirred from his side. D'Orchimont turned and ran from the hall into a dark corridor, where he immediately collided with a man who was coming rapidly in the opposite direction.

"Prithee, friend, show me to the chamber of Madam the Countess of Durbuy," said d'Orchimont, instantly.

"And who are you? Let me pass——"

D'Orchimont leapt upon the man, clutched his throat, and rattled his head against the wall.

"Wilt show me now, damned son of a dog?" he cried.

Shaken and terrified at this ghostly onslaught in the dark, the fellow signified compliance; and stumbled down the passage and up a flight of stone stairs, to a doorway beside which burned a wax taper in a sconce.

D'Orchimont flung his monk's frock upon the ground, lifted the latch and entered, and the door swung-to behind him. Jacqueline de Mirlamont, who had risen to her feet at this sudden entrance, stood there alone. D'Orchimont halted where he was, gazing into her face. The secret and strong emotions that stirred within her, wrote themselves visibly upon her countenance, as she looked at last with her bodily eyes upon the man who dwelt continually in her thoughts. But this bearded, stalwart adventurer with matted locks streaked with grey, whose eyes were fastened upon her with so fierce a longing; and whose presence filled the chamber as if surcharged with some subtle, transcendent force, differed in a manner so amazing from the backward, fresh-faced youth to whose arm she had clung upon the bridge of the iron crucifix at Durbuy, long

ago, that Jacqueline remained mutely gazing upon him, striving to recover some trace of the lost likeness. A horrible doubt stabbed d'Orchimont. Was this the end? That after all, after all, Jacqueline de Mirlamont welcomed him not. He set his teeth and turned aside in his pain: and laid hold of a heavy oaken chair that stood by; and the stout wood cracked and splintered in his grasp.

Jacqueline stepped swiftly forward and caught both his scarred hands in hers: one moment, he looked into her face; the next, he felt her arms about his neck: and all his toils and pains and travels, wounds and weariness, and long captivity, rolled away from him as though they had never been. In that moment, all his woes and labours, were they twenty times as great, should have been swallowed up past all remembrance.

While they sat and talked, a tumult of cries and shouting arose in the Castle: the great bell jangled hurriedly, and was still again; but the two heeded nothing; and presently quiet fell once more, and there was no sound, save the night-wind that sighed without and the water lapping far below.

When d'Orchimont returned to the hall, he found The Wild-Cat and Thibault, friars no longer, seated at the table: the one at the head,

the other at the foot of the board, their naked poniards stuck upright beside them. Don Miguel, who had also doffed his cowl, stood upon the hearth, whence the Castellan's corse had been taken away. Fresh rushes were strewn upon the pavement, and tapers shone upon the table, upon which servitors were setting a meal.

"Hola, Seigneur d'Orchimont," cried The Wild-Cat. "Where is Madam the Countess, my guest, sirrah?"

"Mistress Jacqueline hath gone to tend Madam Tisnacq, and will be here anon. Hast taken the Castle, then?" said d'Orchimont, looking about him in bewilderment.

"That have we," returned the new Castellan. "And address me as the Señor Commandante, if you please, Master Philip. What! It would be strange indeed if a crew of honest Flemings did not rather choose to serve William the Silent of Orange—when the chance was offered them by a couple of Master-Beggars of some consideration. There were to have been some five-score or so more of us to help persuade this loyal garrison: but the floods and frosts prevented them, it seems."

At this moment Jacqueline entered the hall, her cheeks flushed and her eyes shining. D'Orchimont thought he had never beheld an apparition so divine. The Countess went straight to

Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova, and kissed him on both cheeks.

"May God reward you, Señor," she said, "and these brave gentlemen."

The Wild-Cat and Thibault rose and kissed her hand. The Spaniard put his cloak about his shoulders, and stepped forward.

"Señor Commandante," said he, "we have an old, homely proverb which saith, He that will do good to thee, will either go his way, or die. And it is with much sorrow, Señor, that I am come to bid you farewell. I know that you would have me to stay, and I am fain indeed to remain with you. But, my friend, you will readily understand that I may not break bread in the house of the sworn foe of my liege lord, King Philip of Spain. God keep you, Countess, and dower you with long life and great happiness. Take her to England, M. d'Orchimont, where perchance we may meet again, some day. My good friends all, farewell."

"Señor, 'a gentleman is bound to none but to God and the Prince,'" returned The Wild-Cat: quoting from the Spanish popular novel of the day.*

They all, save The Wild-Cat, besought him to stay, but he would not. So the Castellan pressed

* Lazarillo de Tormes. Antwerp, 1553.

upon him the best horse in the Lowestein stables: Jacqueline de Mirlamont and the three Master-Beggars bade him God-speed at the Castle gates; and beheld Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova ride away into the night.

CHAPTER XX.

FIFTEEN SPANISH GENTLEMEN DO ESCORT THE MASTER-BEGGAR.

THE next day, out of the hundred or more patriots to whom The Wild-Cat had given tryst, but five-and-twenty lusty Beggars, a day late, marched into Lowestein: for the rest, no one knew aught of their doings, save that they were scattered over the face of the country, contending with flood and frost.

The Wild-Cat drew d'Orchimont aside to a corner of the ramparts.

"Look you, Philip," said he, "this is no place for you and your betrothed any more. The Spaniards will come upon us to-morrow so sure as the sun rises: there is a troop quartered at Bois-le-Duc, which is but half a day's march westward: and Don Roderigo de Toledo, the Governor, will scarce sit by and see the most notable stronghold in the province filched from under his nose by a couple of Mendicant friars, and the master point of strategical position in this province, garrisoned by rebels. Had we an hundred men in the stronghold, I could not

make up my heart to send you hence: for there would be a goodly siege, with pretty outfalls and such like trim devices. But now—since you are so good as married, Philip, why—out you go!"

D'Orchimont looked at his chief with a very sullen countenance.

"'Tis God's truth," he said presently, "I cannot deny it. And so I am to sneak away."

"Truly, my son, I am sorry for you," said The Wild-Cat. "There will be great fighting. Hearken, Philip," went on the Master-Beggar. "Life is made up of these two, love and war. There is naught else. Follow the one, since destiny hath led you into the road: leave me to follow the other." His great face gleamed, as he stared away into the sky. "I tell you, Philip, I who know, that the way upon which you are going—albeit the path may be hedged with roses—will be no jot easier to travel than the wild and splendid road I am to hew out with my sword. To the same bourne we go, whether it be Paradise or Valhalla, Hades or the drowsy waters of Lethe . . ."

He held out his square, thick hand: d'Orchimont grasped it for a moment: and the two men turned away each from the other.

The same evening, Philip d'Orchimont and Jacqueline de Mirlamont set sail in the boat which had brought the three Master-Beggars

and Don Miguel Carranza de Córdova to Lowestein. The fugitives were to voyage down the narrows between the estuary and the North Sea; and in so doing, they reckoned upon meeting a merchant bottom or a ship of the Prince of Orange's fleet of privateers, which was commanded by his Admiral, Gillain de Fiennes. In either case, they would secure a passage to England, the land of refuge: for the Beggars, however they might be harried and defeated on land, held absolute mastery of the sea: moreover, Jacqueline had with her a large sum in gold, besides letters of credit upon English houses, given to her by the Jew, Don Gabriel de Campuzano Aguilera.

The dawn had scarcely broken on the following morning, when the boom of the cannon rolled across the marsh flats, scattering flocks of wild-fowl far and wide. The Spanish soldiers from Bois-le-Duc had brought a battery to bear upon the Castle: and all day long the guns roared and the iron balls tore shrieking through the air, and beat upon the wall: and all day long the Castle guns flung shot into the earthwork behind which the Spaniard lay unharmed. Bit by bit, the massive outer wall began to rive and splinter: until a widening crack ran from the top to the bottom, enclosing a huge triangular section of masonry, which presently broke

into pieces and fell out. With the crash of the toppling stonework, the attack ceased for that day.

During the night The Wild-Cat caused the barrels of gunpowder which were stored in the basement of the tower to be piled at one end of the great hall: and afterwards the Beggar Captain and Thibault, wrapped in their cloaks, paced the ramparts, or sat beneath a cannon, talking in low tones until daybreak. Through the ragged gap in the outer wall, the dim face of the landscape looked strangely in; and beyond, the red watch fires twinkled in the dark.

"I thank God," said Thibault once, "that my pretty wench Maria hath forgotten me. She thinks only of the boy: and there they are, those two, dwelling at peace in the shadow of Notre Dame de Sablon, in Brussels city."

As the sun rose, the whole regiment of Spaniards advanced to the storming of Lowestein.

Furious, steel-clad waves of swarthy men poured into the breach: checked by fierce onslaught: pressing onwards, trampling the slain underfoot: flinging themselves headlong across the outer ditch; climbing out: fighting hand to hand on the first redoubt; the wave sweeping across the second ditch: reek of boiling oil and molten lead, a horrible crying and shrieking, a

roar of shouting: and scarce a dozen desperate Beggars hurling furious steel-clad figures from the tops of scaling-ladders: a remnant forced backwards step by step, across the ramparts; an ecstasy of hopeless fighting: three men leaping down the stone stairway that descends into the Castle: turning at the bottom, to strike at the nearest face in the throng of wild faces: two men, in the narrow passages, keeping the press at sword's point, as they sprang backward.

Thibault, crying a stream of insult and execration in a high voice, as his custom was in fighting, choked and fell backwards with a sword in his throat: and his slayer tumbled upon him, as The Wild-Cat cut half through the Spaniard's neck.

The next moment the Beggar Captain sprang through the doorway of the great hall; and the press of men in broken, red, and blackened armour halted on the threshold.

Bare-headed, splashed with blood, begrimed with smoke, his doublet rent open at the neck, his sleeves rolled up, his only weapon a four-foot sword that was red from hilt to point, The Wild-Cat, steady and cool, his blue eyes shining and his mouth set in a smile, stood with his left hand on his hip and his point dropped, and ran his glance over the throng of his enemies.

"Gentlemen of Spain," cried The Wild-Cat, "I do require of your courtesy, fifteen proper men of their hands to furnish the Master-Beggar with a retinue that shall go with him into the courts of the King of Heaven."

A short, broad Spaniard in full armour shouldered his way through the crowd of soldiers, and stepped across the threshold with a fencing-room salute.

"The Señor Captain Perea? Señor, I am vastly honoured," said The Wild-Cat, saluting in turn.

The blades clashed and rang: and inside of two minutes, the Spaniard's sword clattered on the ground, and his right hand dangled from his wrist.

The Wild-Cat stepped back. His antagonist picked up his sword with his left hand.

"On guard, sir," he cried.

The Wild-Cat changed his weapon to his left hand: and presently cut through the Spaniard's gorget, deep into his neck.

"One!" cried the Master-Beggar: and sprang across the prostrate body of the Spanish Captain, striking at the press.

"Two! . . . Three!"

He leaped backward: and one after another dashed upon him, to fall prone upon their fellows: for The Wild-Cat fought with a great

skill, and the strength and fury of ten men. The man and his weapon were one: his strenuous wily spirit ran into the subtle steel that stabbed and circled faster than eye could follow: until his life were spent to the dregs, the sword could not fail him.

But as his blood flowed The Wild-Cat began to feel his forces ebbing: his side was torn with a pike-thrust, he had a deep sword-cut in the thigh: and he reckoned the number that yet remained for him to slay, as an exhausted swimmer measures the yards of water between himself and the shore.

"Twelve!" A ring of fallen men was piled about the doorway: for the Spaniards never stopped to drag aside their dead or wounded fellows, but leaped upon, and trampled across them: so that The Wild-Cat, losing his command of the narrow entrance, was forced further and further back into the great chamber.

"Thirteen! . . . Fourteen!"

His sword, caught in the notch of his antagonist's hilt, snapped half-way down the blade. The Wild-Cat sprang at the man and drove the truncheon into his face. The Spaniard dropped backward, tearing The Wild-Cat's weapon out of his hand.

"Fifteen! *Vive les Gueux!*" Five swords pierced him, as the Master-Beggar ran back-

wards. He caught up a smouldering match which had been laid in readiness against the wall, and flung it behind him, into the loose gunpowder that was strewn about the powder-barrels.

CHAPTER XXI

DAWN.

The stars glittered on the frozen flats, flinging a tremulous track that glided athwart the wide river, keeping even pace with the boat in which Philip d'Orchimont sat with one hand guiding the tiller, and the other holding the sheet. Jacqueline de Mirlamont, wrapped in furs, leaned against his knee. The man had attained his end: his heart's desire was given him: and when he thought upon the charge that was become his to keep against the world and fortune, he would have undone no jot of the travail by which he had gained the virtue that dwelt within him.

For Hilarion the monk was dead indeed: and M. Philip d'Orchimont reigned a gentleman in whom M. Philip d'Orchimont reposed a comfortable confidence.

Jacqueline de Mirlamont, resting against her lover, fell quietly to sleep: and all night long, d'Orchimont, tacking and reaching, sailed warily down the narrows, wishing for the day. The dawn had broken over the glimmering ice-

fields in flakes of rose-colour and orange, when Jacqueline awoke with a sound of chanting in her ears.

The boat went swiftly about, the boom swung over, and right ahead the fugitives beheld a black, high-pooped vessel standing towards them. The level rays of the rising sun lit full upon the great red sails, patched here and there with divers colours; and shone, with a sparkle of silver and gold, upon the strange assemblage that crowded the towering forecastle and leaned over the bulwarks: and there flashed into d'Orchimont's mind the recollection of the night in Bouillon, long ago, when the Monk Hilarion had looked on at the sack of Saint Peter's Priory.

For the bearded, long-haired crew, wrapped in silken cope and orfrey, chasuble and jewelled stole, were drinking their morning draught of beer from consecrated chalice and flagon, the spoils of a rich monastery looted overnight.

"'Tis the Beggars of the Sea, my dear, who shall carry us to a safe haven," said d'Orchimont.

FINIS.

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